

Expressive Arts Therapy in Support Groups for Bereaved Adults in a Hospice Setting

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Abstract

Expressive Arts Therapies (EXAT) may be seen as a new practice but can be traced back to the very beginnings of human existence and have been found on all continents and within most cultures around the world. Since earliest recordings of man, art-making has been used to make amends, rehabilitate, and transform a person in holistic ways affecting the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of a person leading to health and overall wellbeing. EXAT can combine the visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing, and other creative processes to foster deep personal growth and community development. EXAT can also be a guided spiritual journey and process-oriented intervention with the role of the therapist as the guide into a safe space for the client to experience integration of the arts. These approaches are convergent with social work practice, which requires creative problem solving, whereby creativity is used effectively to shape, mold, influence and uncover unrealized potential in clients. Expressive Arts Therapy also aligns with social work practice in its theoretical underpinnings, stemming from humanistic, client-centered perspectives. The advanced practicum described herein involved an 8-week Expressive Arts course followed by facilitation of two bereavement support groups in hospice using Expressive Arts Therapy. Some of the Expressive Arts themes explored during the 8-week course and then implemented within bereavement support groups in hospice included: Introduction to Expressive Arts; Exploring Relationships; Stories from the Field; Expressive Arts Modalities; Mindful Music and Movement in Expressive Arts; Planning Expressive Arts Experiences; Professional Issues within Expressive Arts; Sand Tray; and Writing within Expressive Arts. EXAT can be a very effective therapeutic approach in support of those grieving the death of a loved one. With the knowledge, skills, and experience I have gained throughout this advanced practicum, I will be able to confidently incorporate EXAT into my practice when working with individuals, groups, and communities. Whether supporting bereaved individuals or facilitating

bereavement groups, or holding memorial services in the community, EXAT is an effective process legitimized by evidence-based research, supporting clients as they participate in the creative process that can lead to positive change and emancipation. Expressive arts can be integrated into social work as complementary or alternative forms of expression, therapy, and healing aimed at individual and group change and among many populations in support of a wide array of issues. In combining art and activism, social workers using expressive arts can draw public attention to many issues of social concern. Expressive arts also have a place within social work research, using modalities such as photovoice and performance inquiry.

Les thérapies d'art expressif (EXAT) peuvent être considérées comme une nouvelle pratique, mais elles remontent au tout début de l'existence humaine et ont été trouvées sur tous les continents et dans la plupart des cultures du monde. Depuis les premiers enregistrements de l'homme, on a eu recours à la création artistique pour réparer, réhabiliter et transformer une personne de manière globale, en modifiant les aspects physique, émotionnel, mental et spirituel d'une personne menant à la santé et au bien-être général. EXAT peut combiner les arts visuels, le mouvement, le théâtre, la musique, l'écriture et d'autres processus créatifs pour favoriser une croissance personnelle profonde et le développement de la communauté. EXAT peut également être un voyage spirituel guidé et une intervention orientée sur le processus avec le rôle du thérapeute en tant que guide dans un espace sûr permettant au client de faire l'expérience de l'intégration des arts. Ces approches convergent avec la pratique du travail social, ce qui nécessite une résolution de problème créative, dans laquelle la créativité est utilisée efficacement pour façonner, modeler, influencer et révéler le potentiel non réalisé des clients. Expressive Arts Therapy s'aligne également sur la pratique du travail social dans ses fondements théoriques, issus de perspectives humanistes et centrées sur le client. Le stage avancé décrit dans le présent

document comprenait un cours d'arts expressifs de huit semaines, suivi de l'animation de deux groupes de soutien du deuil en hospice, à l'aide de la thérapie par les arts expressifs. Parmi les thèmes des arts expressifs explorés au cours du cours de huit semaines, puis mis en œuvre dans les groupes de soutien aux personnes en deuil dans les centres de soins palliatifs, citons:

Introduction aux arts expressifs; Explorer les relations; Histoires du terrain; Modalités des arts expressifs; Musique consciente et mouvement dans les arts expressifs; Planification

d'expériences dans les arts expressifs; Problèmes professionnels au sein des arts d'expression;

Plateau de sable; et écriture dans les arts d'expression. EXAT peut être une approche

thérapeutique très efficace pour venir en aide à ceux qui souffrent de la mort d'un être cher.

Grâce aux connaissances, aux compétences et à l'expérience que j'ai acquises au cours de ce

stage avancé, je serai capable d'intégrer EXAT en toute confiance à ma pratique lorsque je

travaille avec des individus, des groupes et des communautés. Qu'il s'agisse de soutenir les

personnes endeuillées, de faciliter les groupes de deuil ou d'organiser des services

commémoratifs dans la communauté, EXAT est un processus efficace légitimé par une recherche

factuelle, aidant les clients à participer au processus créatif pouvant conduire à un changement

positif et à l'émancipation. Les arts expressifs peuvent être intégrés au travail social en tant que

formes d'expression, de thérapie et de guérison complémentaires ou alternatives visant le

changement individuel et de groupe et au sein de nombreuses populations afin de prendre en

charge un large éventail de problèmes. En combinant art et activisme, les travailleurs sociaux qui

utilisent des arts d'expression peuvent attirer l'attention du public sur de nombreuses questions

d'intérêt social. Les arts expressifs ont également une place dans la recherche en travail social, en

utilisant des modalités telles que la photovécision et la recherche de performance.

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Grief has existed as long as humans have existed and is present in that place in the middle where we experience life and death, love, and loss (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). Expressions of the painful emotions and attempts to make meaning of life and death go back to early humans as seen in cave paintings, ritualistic chanting, dance, religious art, and spiritual traditions, and is found across cultures. These forms of expression have their place within contemporary grief therapy and have been found to have made a profound contribution (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). As bereaved individuals strive to make sense of a loss, often attempting to go beyond their own loss story and experience, they may find new forms of expression through artistic, expressive means of communication (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014).

Previous theories about the grief process have involved linear stages including denial, shock, bargaining, anger, and then eventually acceptance and recovery (Gregory, 2019). More contemporary approaches are doubtful as to the validity of this previous model as it does not accurately describe the bereavement trajectory as experienced by most who are grieving the death of a loved one (Holland & Neimeyer, 2010). New findings suggest that along with the many variations in grief experiences, reactions, and abilities to find orientation in a changed world, there are many models of support that better account for these variations (Neimeyer, Harris, Winokuer, & Thornton, 2011). As many as one third of those bereaved will adapt to the loss in healthy, productive ways, with some even finding relief that the suffering of their loved one has ended (Bonanno, 2004). Approximately 10 to 15% of people struggle with intense emotional distress and sometimes prolonged grief that is characterised by extreme separation anxiety and preoccupation with the loss. This can result in the bereaved individual's inability to function in their previously assumed life roles and can persist for months or even years. Explored in this advanced practicum is new research in the field of bereavement that attempts to

understand why people grieve so differently and how they might best be supported through new therapeutic interventions such as Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT).

This advanced practicum thesis project explores my intent to develop clinical skills while completing an advanced practicum through training in the use of Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT). Those skills were then applied in support of bereaved individuals within a support group setting at hospice. Training for EXAT took place at the Haliburton School of the Arts in Haliburton, Ontario. This 8-week certificate program provided me with unique skills to support those who are grieving the death of a loved one, addressing grief responses, and promoting healthy, adaptive approaches to their grief process leading to integration of the loss and healing.

Through this practicum, social work skills were refined by facilitating EXAT in a support group setting. This was achieved by working within a multidisciplinary team at hospice, reflecting on my work through the use of a journal, receiving clinical supervision, and integrating theory into practice. The following questions guided my learning throughout my Advanced Practicum: How are art therapy modalities integrated and effectively applied in a helping relationship to foster positive change? Is Expressive Arts Therapy an effective therapeutic approach in a group setting for those seeking bereavement support in a hospice? What challenges will I face in supporting bereaved individuals using EXAT in a group setting? and How will I manage these challenges, and how do social workers use arts-based expressive and creative methods in their practices? As well, this project sought to understand how EXAT can be applied in social work specifically when working with individuals, groups, the community, and within social work research.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

The foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT) can be linked back to Carl Jung (Cruger-Hansen, 2012). Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, is credited with an intervention called active imagination referring to any conscious action that creates images or stories that are related to unconscious processes (Cruger-Hansen, 2012). Active imagination encourages the individual to relax their normal awareness or inhibitions without completely letting the unconscious take over. To trigger active imagination, Jung encouraged his clients to paint, sculpt, write, act, or use other art forms that tap into the unconscious. Cruger-Hansen (2012) explained that Jung encouraged his clients to become aware of the parts of the unconscious that came up through this process. Jung studied the use of art to alleviate or contain feelings of trauma, fear, or anxiety and also to repair, restore and heal from troubling or traumatic events (Cruger-Hansen, 2012). At times of emotional distress, Jung himself often drew, painted, or made objects, and constructed things which he realized was far more than recreational or just a hobby; he found that these activities had therapeutic benefits (Cruger-Hansen, 2012).

The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (2012) stated that EXAT combines the visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing, and other creative processes to foster deep personal growth and community development. The Association went on to define EXAT as a guided spiritual journey and process-oriented intervention with the role of the therapist as the guide into a safe space for the client to experience this integration of the arts. In his grounded theory study of Expressive Art Therapy used with elderly clients, Pappas (2010) explained that EXAT is distinguished from art therapy by the “multimodal”, “intermodal”, or

“creative connection” aspect. By combining different creative modalities and moving from one art form to the next, a shift occurs. A creative connection occurs when one art form stimulates and fosters creativity in another art form. As listed by Pappas (2010), expressive art modalities can include music therapy, bibliotherapy, dance/movement therapy, art therapy, drama therapy, play therapy, and sand tray therapy. In this chapter, I will begin by describing and defining the various expressive arts modalities along with theoretical, historical, and spiritual perspectives of each. As well, this chapter will explore the benefits and unique characteristics of the integration of various art forms in EXA therapy along with their limitations. Finally, this chapter will explore arts-based methods within social work and in support of the bereaved.

Expressive Arts Modality Descriptions

Music

According to the Canadian Association of Music Therapists ("About Music Therapy", 2016), singing, playing an instrument, writing music, and listening to music can provide opportunities to reflect, process, and interact with unconscious or conscious material that may be reflected in an individual's life. Other expressive modalities such as artwork and movement, can be used in combination with the music. Knill, Barba and Fuchs (2004) linked the relationship between music and other expressive art modalities, providing rationale for the integration saying, “Music engages not only the auditory sense, but also the sensorimotor, tactile and visual faculties. It communicates through rhythm and sound and through lyrics that may evoke strong visual images” (p. 32). The visual images created by the music can be expressed through a visual art piece, expanding from a music-based exercise to an art-based exercise within the same therapy session giving a new expression to the thoughts and feelings brought forth.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy also referred to as poetry therapy, creative writing or therapeutic story telling is one of the most recent expressive therapies to become organized professionally and involves storytelling or the reading of specific texts for the purpose of healing (Pappas, 2014). It uses an individual's relationship to the content of books and poetry and other written words as therapy. The practitioner often incorporates creative writing techniques in a session in interactive ways that provide for discussion and processing (McNiff, 2009). Letter writing is an art form many pursue as a way of communicating with the deceased and can be healing for bereaved persons, in part because it can put them into direct communication with their loved ones in a very intimate personal way (Brandoff, 2018).

Dance/Movement Therapy

According to Dance Movement Therapy Ontario (DMTO, 2018), “Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is a relational process in which the clients and therapist engage creatively using body movement and dance to assist integration of emotional, cognitive, physical, and social aspects of self.” Pappas (2014) wrote that Dance Movement Therapists believe in the interconnection between the body, mind, and emotions, and how they influence one another. They are interconnected and changes in movement of the physical body are reflected in changes in mood or thoughts.

Visual Art Therapy

According to the Canadian Art Therapy Institution (CATA, 2018), art therapy combines the creative process and psychotherapy, facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using

imagery, colour and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, thoughts and feelings can be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate. Gil (2014) explained that art therapy has unique expressive benefits for those who have experienced trauma and are overwhelmed by a sense of insecurity in the world. Gil (2014) went on to say that art therapy is uniquely effective in facilitating an emotional connection and sense of safety. Grief therapists recognize the value in developing personal grief rituals such as making personal symbols through art and how this helps in honoring and memorializing the dead, and in the process of letting go and moving on to experience meaning in the loss and eventually self-transformation (Brandoff, 2018).

Play Therapy

According to the Canadian Play Therapy Association (Canadian Association for Play Therapy, 2018), play therapy is a psychotherapeutic treatment approach specifically developed to help children between the ages of three to 12 years old. A trained play therapist works with a child to explore and resolve problems through the therapeutic use of play. The Association explained that play therapy is founded on the principle that children learn the most when they communicate with others. It is through play therapy that children are allowed to express deep thoughts and feelings in a manner that feels comfortable. The often-spontaneous re-enactments involved with play therapy can bring forward subconscious episodes of traumatic events to the consciousness of the child allowing the child to create new meanings of the events (Coady & Lehmann, 2016).

Sand Tray Therapy

Sand tray is a treatment approach, an intervention, and an assessment tool for trauma that provides a unique, safe, and protected environment to allow the client to reconstruct the trauma

story (Gil, 2006). Sand tray has been an effective technique used in the healing process as a tactile, nonverbal experience that promotes awareness of deeply personal issues (Arlette, 2006). Clients are asked to choose figurines as they feel drawn to them and then arrange them in sand in a way that reflects what the client cannot articulate. This process can evoke spontaneous metaphors and realizations that bring clarity and understanding to the client. Through the sand tray experience individuals begin to heal without using words.

Theoretical, Historical, and Spiritual Perspectives of EXAT

Expressive Arts Theory

Expressive Arts Therapy falls within the humanistic approach which emphasizes the use of intuitive processes and inductive reasoning to work with each client in unique and personal ways (Coady & Lehmann, 2016). Humanistic theories such as client-centered theory can be traced back to Carl Rogers in the 1940s and has historical connections to social work practice, believing strongly in the importance of the therapeutic relationship (Coady, 2008). Optimistically, humanistic theories believe that individuals have an inherent desire to grow, heal, and self-actualize (Coady & Lehman, 2016). Coady (2008) wrote that within humanistic theory problems originate in painful, traumatic experiences and in the defenses that are developed as the individual learns to cope, often in maladaptive ways. These unproductive coping strategies prevent authentic, productive experiences in the present. The desired outcome of therapies such as EXAT is that the individual will develop adaptive coping strategies and a new awareness and new meaning that allows for self-acceptance in the present. Humanistic therapies function under the assumption that people are far wiser than their intellect alone, and emotion plays an important role in effective decision making and functioning (Coady, 2008). This perspective

allows the individual to focus on the present and on personal growth and self-actualization rather than the scientific or deductive approach that focuses on symptom alleviation.

Client-centered theory, as defined by Carl Rogers, is not one in which we help our clients through professional knowledge of theories of personality or understandings of family dysfunction or use of critical ecological systems theory (Rothery & Tutty, 2008). Instead, we help facilitate growth by providing a particular kind of relationship through Roger's (1992) core conditions that include congruence, acceptance, and empathy. When the interpersonal conditions of congruence (genuineness, honesty, and directness), acceptance (unconditional positive regard), and empathy (accurately sensing the feelings and personal meanings that the client is experiencing and communicating that understanding to the client in order to check for accuracy and build therapeutic alliance), are available to us, we have what we need to thrive and grow. A humanistic approach using client-centered theory allows the helper to facilitate change by providing, in a therapeutic setting, what others receive through healthy, loving relationships (Rothery & Tutty, 2008). In the absence of healthy relationships and to the extent the client has experienced trauma and is estranged from themselves, they require the therapeutic relationship to provide those core conditions in a very skilled way (Rothery & Tutty, 2008).

Humanistic art therapy relies on the experiential process of art-making and its ability to transform the individual in ways that bring about healing, positive change, and self-actualization (Serlin, 2007). Rogers (2013) explained that the expressive arts are an important expansion of the person-centred approach because they integrate all aspects of the self. The person-centred approach must involve this holistic view of the client in order to foster personal authenticity, self-insight, and healing through non-verbal forms of self-expression and communication (Rogers, 2013). Rogers (1992) explained that her approach to expressive arts therapy rests on

her faith in the innate capacity of her clients to reach their full potential which is achieved through being accepted and understood especially when feeling fear, rage, grief, or jealousy. Rogers (2013) also described what she refers to as the Creative Connection process, a journey inward at first, through expressive arts, tapping into the unconscious. The client works toward becoming aware of various aspects of self, gaining insight, and becoming empowered. Then by connecting to others in a supportive and empathetic environment, new ways of relating to community are learned that lead to broader circles of influence where the client becomes collaborative, able to access higher purposes and internal strengths, while feeling connected to the world around them.

Music Therapy

According to the Canadian Association of Music Therapists (Music Therapist, key to your health, 2018), singing, playing an instrument, writing music, and listening to music can provide opportunities to reflect, process, and interact with unconscious or conscious material that may be reflected in an individual's life. Other expressive modalities, such as visual art and movement, can be used in combination with the music. Music therapy can be traced back in history to the shamans who used what they believed as the power of music to heal, but, today, music therapy is recognized world wide as an effective therapy for positive change in the psychological, physical, cognitive, or social functioning of individuals (Forinash, 2005). Music therapy focuses on helping clients achieve self-actualization and personal meaning and can take place in a variety of settings (Forinash, 2005). The focus is on recognizing the client as a complex being who exists in relation to the world around them and on helping the client achieve meaning and fulfillment within the circumstances in which they may find themselves. Rogers (2013) wrote that person-centred music therapy provides a non-verbal artistic medium

with the opportunity for a therapeutic relationship in a supportive environment that promotes growth, where the client feels understood, heard, and nurtured. As each client makes decisions about their musical choices, unconditional positive regard can be established through casual improvisation and the responsive nature of music. The therapist approaches the client and their musical choices with complete acceptance and without judgement. Musical communication to and from the client using empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard can evoke very strong emotional responses.

Dance/Movement Therapy

The field of dance/movement therapy is founded on the belief that adaptive, healthy functioning depends on the integration of the mind, the body, and the spirit, and without this type of integration, the client may suffer from psychophysical disorders (Loman, 2005). Loman (2005) wrote that dance/movement therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses movement as the medium that allows for interactions between the therapist and the client and promotes positive change. Among several of the theoretical orientations found in the field of dance/movement therapy are the Chace approach, integrated developmental approach, and authentic movement approach (Loman, 2005).

Marian Chace used mirroring and attunement techniques to meet her patients where they were emotionally providing a nonverbal level of communication (Levy, 1992). Through mirroring, Chace was able to reflect back to her client a deep understanding and emotional acceptance through nonverbal communication allowing for a deeper, expanded, and clearer understanding and validation of the emotional experience. Levy (1992) went on to explain that attunement or movement empathy, relates to the client's awareness of the position and

movement of the parts of the body and how muscular tensions that are felt in one person are also felt in the other. Empathetic connection is developed as the therapist creates a non-judgemental environment that is conducive to unencumbered sharing that leads to growth where the client is always in control and directs the movement; the empathic therapist follows the client's lead. Reflection is then used as a means of information gathering and as a place of intervention in the therapy. The integrated developmental approach is used to address the client's psychological, interpersonal, and spiritual development and is linked to Jungian theories whereby therapists observe developmental phases in movement and help clients work through blocks, regressions, and delays (Lewis, 2002). This approach allows the therapist to better understand the individual and their interpersonal relationships and how they have related in groups and in the family system throughout their life. Developed by dance therapist Mary Whitehouse in 1986, the authentic movement approach takes the client back to their earliest memories of life experiences and addresses both their desire and fear of seeing themselves honestly and clearly (Musicant, 2001). The body and the movement provide the narrative where unconscious material enters into the consciousness and new realizations about self, positive and negative, may be processed and accepted.

Drama Therapy and Psychodrama

From a human developmental perspective, drama begins as soon as an infant becomes aware that they are separate with an individual body of their own that has its own identity (Landy, 2005). Just as with consciousness, drama allows a person to stand outside themselves and view themselves as separate from themselves. Landy (2005) explained that when a person examines themselves, they become two entities who both think about senses and names, and is thought of, sensed, and named at the same time. These two beings, the "I" and the "me" are in

dramatic terms referred to as the “actor” and the “observer.” The human ability to dramatize is innate with all humans being able to engage in their inner lives through thought and with their social lives through action. Psychodrama was founded by psychiatrist, Levy Moreno in the 1920s, as Moreno challenged Freud’s belief that effective psychological change occurs through verbal communication with a therapist (Landy, 2005). Moreno believed in effective psychological change through drama where the client replays disturbing or challenging experiences in their lives as others are witness to the dramatic re-enactment. Moreno believed that when people took on a role and enacted that role in front of others, they revealed true aspects of themselves and felt seen and heard. The term “role” is defined by Moreno as the actual form the self takes including the psychosomatic role representing the body, the psycho-dramatic role representing the imagination and the social role defined as relationships with others. Role Theory argues that humans play out roles as natural forms of expression, and the human experience can be understood in terms of patterns of behaviour that elude to certain ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Landy, 2005). The desired outcome of drama therapy is to help people find a balance between their contradictory roles, for example the victim and the survivor, and to learn to live with their misunderstandings or misconceptions of various roles.

Poetry Therapy

Poetry is multilingual and reaches all psychotherapies in their own language, revealing the unconscious, exploring relationships, causing indirect influence on behavior, and promoting growth and positive change (Gorelick, 2005). More recently, the theoretical orientations of psychoanalytic, interpersonal, behavioural/cognitive, systems, and humanistic/expressive schools of thought have begun to merge within poetry and creative writing in therapy. From a

psychoanalytic perspective, truth is the client's advantage while addressing the fears and emotions that those truths carry (Gorelick, 2005). Poetry therapy believes that individuals can understand and change what is emotionally painful by giving it a name and form through the use of psychodynamic concepts. The Interpersonal school of thought emphasizes how we affect one another in our relationships and by taking the interpersonal approach, individuals are able to increase their understanding of themselves in relation to others (Gorelick, 2005). Poetry therapy is meant to reflect back what is seen in self and helps to identify repeating patterns. The Behavioural/Cognitive perspective looks to rational thinking to influence feelings and behaviours in a positive way and provides techniques to recognize and change harmful patterns as well as teach new skills and approaches for positive change (Gorelick, 2005). Within the Behavioural/Cognitive perspective, poetry helps individuals to reorder their lives in the same way they are required to logically think through and organize a poem, with order and structure, allowing the confused mind to gain clarity and understanding. The Systems school of thought sees the individual as part of a social fabric, interconnected with others and the environment and if one part of that fabric is changed, the client's self perception will be affected (Gorelick, 2005). Poetry and poetic images hold intrigue and are complex and hold within them the client's problems as well and the solutions. The humanistic/expressive orientation of poetry promises growth and change as individuals actualize their higher being using imagination and creativity (Gorelick, 2005).

Play Therapy

Within the many play therapy theories there is a clear distinction between non-directive and directive approaches to play therapy (Homeyer & DeFrance, 2005). Directive play therapists guide and interpret the play while a non-directive therapist will leave responsibility

and direction to the child. Homeyer and DeFrance (2005) described three leading theories including child-centered, Adlerian, and Jungian theories. Child-centered theory is at the nondirective extreme of the directive/nondirective continuum with the child in charge of their own growth and direction while supervised by the therapist who provides the appropriate, safe and secure atmosphere so that the child is able to experience a full range of emotions. The child centered approach requires a warm and friendly relationship with the child as well as respect for the child's abilities. The therapist must not direct the play or impose time limits but should place boundaries on the child where necessary for safety. Creating this environment allows the child to fully experience all parts of self and their life experiences, and enables them to move toward self-actualization. Homeyer and DeFrance (2005) described Adlerian Play Therapy as a more directive approach that integrates concepts of psychology including the belief that children are inherently social beings and need to belong and will examine their own family to decide where they fit in (Kottman, 2001). As well, this perspective believes that children's behaviour is purposeful and goal oriented; they are creative and unique and capable of reaching their goals. Jungian Play therapy is midway on the non-directive/directive continuum involving components of both (Homeyer & DeFrance, 2005). Based on the theory of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, Jungian play therapy gives attention to archetypes or representations that direct and influence our emotions and behavior. These images help the therapist to better understand the child's personality development. The Jungian belief is that the child will naturally gravitate to the areas of play that will most effectively express his or her struggles. Limits and boundaries are set that allow for full emotional expression while protecting the child in the environment and protecting the relationship with the child. The child is able to begin to understand their painful emotions leading to change and a healthier sense of self.

Sandtray Therapy

Homeyer and Sweeney (1998) defined sand tray therapy as an expressive and projective mode of psychotherapy involving the realization and processing of personal issues through the use of specific sand tray materials as a nonverbal form of communication that is led by the client. This method seeks to connect with clients in an authentic way, without making assumptions about what is communicated and without perceptions, perspectives, or preconceived notions. Sand tray involves the use of sand, water, a tray, and a wide selection of miniature figures for the client to choose from in creating a scene or scenario of their own in the sand tray with the miniature figures. Two similar but different approaches include the World Technique and Sandplay therapy (Homeyer & Sweeney, 1998). The World Technique, developed by Margaret Lowenfeld, explores the internal world of a child's experience where the child is able to communicate their perception through a medium that they are comfortable with without trying to fit the child's creation into existing theoretical constructs (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2005). Dora Kalff studied at the Jung institute and developed what is known as Sandplay therapy, influenced by the Jungian approach that focuses on the "free and protected space" for the child and the creation in the sand realizing that the child needs to have free expression of anything and everything. The safe space serves as a protected psychological and physical container for the child to safely and creatively process (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2005).

World technique and Sandplay have many similarities and some differences in their therapeutic focus; the goal of both is to uncover nonverbal material (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2005). They both consider the healing power of the child's own psyche and focus not only on the creative process but the finished product as well (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2005). The World Technique uses a more directive approach while the Sandplay therapist is far more passive and

does not intervene in the child's creative process (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2005). The World Technique stores miniatures in drawers forcing a more deliberate choosing of figures, while Sandplay has miniatures on shelves readily available so the child can choose more intuitively allowing the unconscious to be "caught" by metaphorical images (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2005).

History of EXAT

Expressive Arts Therapies may be seen as a new practice but can be traced back to the very beginnings of human existence and have been found on all continents and within most cultures around the world (Brook, 2006). Since earliest recordings of man, art has been used to make amends, rehabilitate, and transform a person in holistic ways affecting the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the person leading to health and overall wellbeing (Malchiodi, 2006). From prehistoric cultures to the Paleolithic period going back 35,000-45,000 years ago in human history, as seen in archeological findings, evidence shows how art was used in spiritual rituals, communication and celebrations, for healing, and to mark occasions such as marriages or births (Malchiodi, 2006). From South African cave paintings, to ancient Greek healing practices, to Roman dramas and comedies, to Egyptian and ancient Oriental healing methods, to Chinese art-based languages, to Japanese therapeutic uses of the arts, integrative practices were an integral part of ancient civilizations (Pappas, 2014).

Unfortunately, during the middle ages, there was a departure from the incorporation of expressive arts as art was separated from the field of medicine, and the physically and mentally ill were treated with surgery and prayer (McNiff, 2009). During this time of religious persecution in Europe, artistic expression was suppressed and artists were under the authority of the church. McNiff (2009) wrote that during this time Muslim, Jewish, Arabic, and Islamic

scholars kept the advancements made in expressive arts alive in their writings and over time these teachings reached Europe leading to a rebirth of the use of expressive arts. According to McNiff (2009), over the span of the 14th to 17th centuries, during the Renaissance, the expressive arts influenced almost all aspects of European life, even within the medical field as music therapy was used as preventative medicine.

Enter the Age of Enlightenment during the 18th century and then the Victorian influence in the 19th century reaching from Europe over to America and with it conservative religion that again suppressed artistic expression and freedom (McNiff, 2009). Artistic expression was once again separated from “legitimate” healing methods and creative expression was replaced with commercialism as art was seen as a commodity that was meant for the wealthy. Throughout the 19th century up to the 1970s, religious practices in Europe and in the West dictated how art was taught and used, and how the integrated or holistic views of expressive arts was lost. Artistic modalities were considered and taught individually, with artists specializing in one form of art or another (McNiff, 2009). In the 1970s the integrative approach with regards to clinical practice re-emerged with the establishment of the first institutional setting for expressive arts (Pappas, 2014). The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association and the Expressive Arts Therapy program was established by Jack Weller in California.

Today the Ontario Expressive Arts Therapy Institution’s (OEAT) mission is to: “Develop, steward, and promote the Expressive Arts Therapy profession and the interests of Expressive Arts Therapists (OEAT, 2009). The organization serves to uphold high standards of competent and ethical practice in alignment with the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists with a vision towards “helping people everywhere to share in the creative powers of expressive arts to transform their inner worlds and communities recognizing and

fosters the essential values of imagination and creative expression through the arts in psychotherapy, education, social justice and community development” (OEAT, 2009). Social work’s approach to arts-based methods is discussed later in this chapter.

Spirituality and Expressive Arts Therapy

Most expressive arts therapists and practitioners acknowledge the highly spiritual dimension of the creative process (Wallingford, 2009). Bell (2008) stated that art-making is deeply connected to the transcendent and non-materialistic qualities of the human experience. Bell (2008) wrote that spirituality is identified as a significant dimension that has the ability to help create meaning-making through the use of art, especially with those dying or grieving a death. This process can open up a space where spirituality can be acknowledged, explored, and understood. The therapeutic benefits include affirmation and validation of personal identity and worth. Conforti (2014) wrote about the non-verbal nature of the arts, along with its transcendent nature, as necessary in uncovering the deepest suffering. Conforti (2014) reminded the reader that from the beginning of time humanity has found ways to express both love and terror through art. Turning away from this creative urge is to diminish our life force while also ignoring our moral mandate to be as fully present as possible with someone who is suffering (Conforti, 2014). Conforti (2014) explained that creative urges are outside of space and time. When incorporating art therapies into our practice, we are allowing the spirit to enter in to a place where we are able to engage with deep seeded trauma and facilitate change where once an individual was held captive to their traumatic experiences (Conforti, 2014).

Rogers (1993) wrote that many people she has worked with over the years reported experiencing an awakening to their higher selves or an opening to universal energy while

engaging in expressive arts therapy, admitting that she herself felt more in touch spiritually particularly through movement and sound in EXAT. Rogers (1993) wrote that “involving oneself intensely with the creative process brings an alignment of mind and body, creating an opening to receive divine energy” (p.184).

Integration, Unique Characteristics, and Limitations of EXAT

Integrating the Arts in EXAT

Although the use of art therapies can be traced back to the beginnings of human existence (Brook, 2006), the term expressive arts therapy was coined by William Goldman, MD, the Commissioner of Mental Health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (McNiff, 2009). In the 1970's, Dr. Goldman promoted multidisciplinary training in expressive arts for psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and psychologists, as well as other professions. Shaun McNiff, professor at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was appointed by Dr. Goldman to represent “expressive therapy” on his advisory committee for this professional training. Given that this approach to client care was unfamiliar to many and in an attempt to bring this multidisciplinary team together for training in expressive therapies, McNiff and Goldman taught the art modalities in combination. McNiff (2009) described how he adopted the term “expressive therapy” and went on to develop the first truly multidisciplinary graduate program at Lesley University where all of the arts were integrated into a field called expressive therapy. This graduate program was internationally known, bringing students from around the world, teaching them how the different art forms, used together, naturally complement one another when there is a commitment to the full range of human emotion and expression. McNiff (2009) spoke to his experiences with integrated use of the arts as “repeatedly deepening the range and imagination of expression and

ability to engage the whole person in the therapeutic process” (p. 3). McNiff believed that one art form, and, in his case, visual arts, can be what he called the “trunk of his integration tree” (p. 25). While McNiff is first and foremost a trained visual artist, he uses all art forms in his teaching and in his practice. His partner in developing the expressive arts program at Lesley University, Paolo Knill, was primarily a musician but also being a pioneer in the field of expressive arts in therapy, he embraced all other art forms in both his teaching and in his practice as well (McNiff, 2009). Both McNiff and Knill found that most students in their program, seeking to increase their understanding and proficiency with the arts, chose art disciplines outside of their primary discipline in which to focus their attention. One such student, a trained dancer, chose visual arts as their focus of study at Lesley University. Likewise, an accomplished painter chose psychodrama as their interest within the program. According to McNiff and Knill, the students reported increased self-expression when working outside of, but in harmony with, their original artistic disciplines and were very excited by the possibilities of helping others express themselves by using a wider range of artistic modalities. The main objective of the program was to encourage professionals to use a variety of art forms with their clients to encourage further creative expression in whatever form met the individual client’s needs or the needs of the group with which they were to work.

McNiff (2009) taught that the premise of the expressive arts is inherently multimodal, much like the healing process itself and includes all of life such as the specific elements of gesture, body movement, imagery, sound, words, and enactment. These elements go hand in hand and complement one another, and are inseparable in art as well as in life. McNiff (2009) believed that by dividing the art therapies of visual art, music, dance, drama, writing, and poetry into specialized individual professions adds to already divided camps in the mental health field.

Coining the phrase “intermodal expressive therapy”, Knill et al. (2003) pointed out that expressive therapy has too often been referred to as a nonverbal therapy, when, in fact, it is both verbal and non-verbal. Knill et al. (2003) explained that humans communicate, sometimes unintentionally, in many ways that are not limited to speech. This non-verbal communication can come through various art modalities including visual images, movement, sound, silence, rhythm, words, and actions. As with all of the art disciplines several senses are involved at one time and a variety of communication modalities are at play. When we paint, our sensorimotor and tactile senses are engaged, we are communicating visually by viewing the image, and rhythm is communicated through the use of line, colour, texture, and repetition. In the same way, Knill et al. (2003) pointed out that music communicates not only through the auditory sense, but also sensorimotor and tactile, visual faculties as well as communicating by means of rhythm, sound, and lyrics which can evoke very strong visual images. To dismissively classify EXAT as a nonverbal therapy may be to miss the connection between the integration of art modalities as complimentary to the very many ways humans communicate and express themselves.

Several others have contributed to the research exploring EXAT and the efficacy of an integrated arts-based therapeutic approach. Knill (2003) credited Steven Levine with introducing EXAT in Canada after working with Shaun McNiff at Lesley University. Levine (2014) believed that the integration of expressive therapy must be found by each individual therapist as they realize the common denominator as being the client’s own imagination that allows them to express suffering and overcome it at the same time. This, Levine (2014) believed, is the integrating process. Levine’s (2014) concept of poiesis helped to deepen and extend a better understanding of expressive arts in therapy and the integration of the arts. The term poiesis is an ancient Greek word that means “making” and refers to art making that is not separate from other

forms of construction or “making” and is not a specialized activity. Levine (2014) wrote that poiesis or “making” is an extension of the basic need and ability of humans to shape their worlds. According to Levine and Levine (2011), humans are distinct from other beings in that we are not pre-adapted to our environments but have the ability to build different, more suitable environments from very diverse surroundings. In doing so, we not only reshape our environments but we reshape ourselves (Levine & Levine, 2011). The incorporation of various art forms as tools for “making” in a therapeutic setting can facilitate this reshaping of the self.

Rogers developed The Creative Connection to describe the process of allowing one art form to directly influence another (Rogers, 1993; Rogers, 2011). Rogers believed that by using various art modalities in a particular sequence, the journey inward can be intensified (Rogers, 1993; Rogers, 2011). By shifting from one artistic expression to another, the client may be brought closer to their true self, more in tune to the depths of mind, body, and spirit gaining new realizations about themselves. Halprin (2003) wrote about combining the various art forms in order to strengthen the connections and interplay between the body, emotions, and imagination. Halprin (2003) believed that the client should work with one modality at a time but should shift back and forth from one to the other so that they are constantly working with the interplay between the various art forms or medium and between the psychological and emotional issues that arise. As we consider ourselves holistically, we understand that the physical and psychological are inseparable, one affecting the other along with the five senses; none exist alone as all are connected (Wallingford, 2009). Moon (2008) spoke to the importance of responding to, in some way, one artistic expression by creating another one that speaks to the first. Moon (2008) taught that by leading your client to write a poem in response to their own painting may facilitate a transformative experience of intensified meaning making and deeper understanding of

the art work. More importantly, the issues that brought the client to therapy in the first place may be realized and resolved as a result. Similarly, Malchiodi (2005) wrote about art responding to art, stating that by using a variety of art modalities, client's stories are given opportunity to be fully realized through the various means of expression, for example, a poem can be written about a drawing, a painting can be made about a movement, and a short play can be enacted in response to a piece of music.

Unique Characteristics of EXAT

Expressive art therapies add a very unique dimension to psychotherapy because they have several specific characteristics not always found in traditional, verbal therapies, including self-expression, active participation, imagination, and mind-body connections (Malchiodi, 2005). Malchiodi (2005) explained that all therapies, in one way or another, encourage clients to turn within, to explore themselves, but expressive therapies also encourage self-expression as the main objective in the process. Malchiodi (2005) wrote that clients often discover new ways to express themselves leading to the adoption of new, adaptive behaviours. As past experiences are brought forth a container for feelings and perceptions is created. This container may help to deepen the client's understanding of themselves leading to emotional healing, conflict resolution, and an overall sense of peace and well-being. Malchiodi (2005) went on to explain that the therapist should not interpret the client's artwork but should simply facilitate the process. As the work is explained by the client, the narrative does not become the therapy, the therapy comes from the art process. When there are no words to communicate a painful memory or a traumatic experience, the art form and the process convey messages through touch, visual images, or guided body movements (Rothschild, 2000).

Psychologists have defined EXAT as “action therapies” because they are action-oriented and require the client to put forth some time and energy and to become an active participant (Malchiodi, 2005). This active participation allows the client to direct their attention to the art for awhile, which may help to alleviate emotional stress and provide the necessary time to build a trusting therapeutic alliance between client and therapist (Malchiodi, 2005). As well, clients are brought into a special space that, when they are ready, allows them to fully concentrate on their issues, goals, and behaviours and in time, with all senses engaged, these expressive arts activities allow the client to redirect their awareness to the visual, tactile, and auditory which may allow for new avenues of self expression (Malchiodi, 2005).

Imagination, as described by Levine (2011), is the key component in EXAT that helps to understand the use of art and play in therapy. Levine (2011) explained that imagination is the healing agent at the heart of all forms of self-expression and that creativity only speaks to the artistic outcome, the final product. Imagination is concerned with unhindered self-expression, freedom of experimentation, and honest verbal reflections regardless of the outcome of the finished product, or even if an art piece was completed. EXAT modalities can be very helpful for clients who may be limited in their ability to use imagination in problem solving (Malchiodi, 2005). A person who has experienced trauma and is experiencing obsessive thoughts and memories related to that trauma, might use EXAT to ignite their imagination in ways they have never experienced, discovering new creative solutions that lead to change and resolution (Malchiodi, 2005).

Mind-body interventions are described as those that have the ability to ignite the mind to influence bodily functions and affect symptoms (Malchiodi, 2005). According to the National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) in the United States, many of the

expressive therapies are considered to be mind-body interventions because they are both forms of psychotherapy and therapies that use the senses to bring about positive change (Edwards, 2018). The NCCIH (2018) reported that advances made in neuroscience have highlighted the potential of EXAT as an effective intervention with mood disorders, stress disorders, and other physical illnesses. As argued in their research, Coholic, Loughheed, and Cadell (2009), discussed the incorporation of art into therapy with those suffering PTSD that allows for emotional expressions that can be made in a safe way as the artwork becomes a container for emotional pain and anxiety. Coholic et al. (2009) found that drawing helped maltreated children with memory recall which helped the children discuss stressful situations more effectively leading to more detailed narratives. With regard to the mind-body characteristics of EXAT, Malchiodi (2009) also described music, art, and dance as helpful in promoting the body's relaxation response, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, and promoting a calm and confident state of being associated with perceptions of health, wellness, and happiness.

Limitations of EXAT

There are, as with any therapy, limitations with EXAT. Malchiodi (2005) pointed out that some individuals may be reluctant to engage in expressive arts in therapy because they believe they are not artistic or creative enough, and cannot produce art that is adequate or correct and sometimes it is difficult to convince them otherwise. Feeling anxious about their abilities, they may be resistant to active participation. On the other hand, McNiff (2009) wrote that sometimes the clients with training in the arts have a more difficult time letting go of their known ways of creating in order to fully give themselves over to spontaneous forms self-expression, which can interfere with their success in therapy. McNiff (2009) also noted that another possible limitation has to do with therapists who may not be properly trained to use

EXAT in their practice and may make the mistake of trying to interpret what their clients are expressing leading to incorrect conclusions. Malchiodi (2005) noted that other therapists might proceed with their clients in a rigid, mechanical way, using particular EXAT activities and techniques with every client without considering which technique or modality would be best for the individual with consideration to their presenting problem, history, and goals. Malchiodi (2005) pointed out that it is very important for the therapist to use active listening skills during assessments and plan their interventions based on what is best for that client individually or what is best for each support group without assuming that what is good for one scenario is best for all.

Another drawback, according to Malchiodi (2005), is the lack of research with regard to the efficacy of expressive art therapies. Music therapy is the most widely studied art form for therapy, probably because physiological and behavioural reactions to music therapy interventions can be quantified. With that said, the research has increased in the area of arts-based therapies used to treat trauma, emotional disorders, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and autism (Malchiodi, 2005). Other practical limitations to EXAT include the cost of art materials; art therapies are labour intensive; the logistics of finding appropriate venues; finding a medium that is not provocative for the client; time constraints in sessions; client's disinterest in art; and previous negative experiences with art (Horns, 2007). As well, social workers are sometimes unwilling or hesitant to use arts-based methods in their practices because they feel they are not properly trained to do so (Coholic, 2019). According to Coholic (2019), there are a lot of resources available to social workers that outline in detail a wide variety of arts-based activities that can be incorporated into current practices. Coholic (2019) pointed out that some knowledge building and practice is required in order to become familiar with these new methods and execute them effectively, but social

workers need not disregard them entirely due to lack of training, but instead, rely on their social work training with arts-based methods as a compliment.

Arts-Based Methods within Social Work and with the Bereaved

EXAT in Social Work

The history of the arts in social work can be traced back to the Hull House, a settlement house founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates in the United States in 1889 (Konrad, 2017). Funds raised in support of Hull House came, in part, from art sold through the Butler Art Gallery, established in 1891. Konrad (2017) explained that social casework and the scientific method using evidence-based practices, as pioneered by Mary Richmond, primarily informed the social work profession. In the 1970s, a new influence gained attention with Freire's (1972) philosophy that brought forth an interest in the arts and culture among social workers as a means of advocating and intervening. In the 1990s, Goldstein (1992) posed questions asking if the arts made a difference to success in social work practice and if there was enough evidence to prove its efficacy (Damianakis, 2007). Goldstein (1992) wrote that practitioners who shaped their practice around the arts and humanities should hold their practice to high standards so that the art may be respected and legitimized as an effective intervention. Konrad (2017), wrote that even today research of the arts in social work is inadequate and the connection between the use of arts-based approaches and health improvement is not apparent. A theory is needed that establishes causation as well as a clear definition of "the arts." Currently, there is a need for empirical evidence that speaks to the efficacy of arts-based approaches in social work as new innovative ways of providing needed services is required (Wehbi, McCormick, & Angelucci, 2016).

Social work itself is an art requiring creativity, intuition, and self-expression in order to shape, mold, influence, and uncover unrealized potential (Siporin, 1975). Social workers have unique expertise and knowledge in many areas of the human experience at both micro and macro levels and are open to the increasing use of holistic arts-based methods that create space for positive change and adaptive coping strategies (Coholic, 2014).

Arts-based group therapy methods employed by social workers and certified child/youth workers had positive effects with groups of children who had experienced trauma including increases in enthusiasm, confidence, self-esteem, and communication skills (Coholic, Loughheed, & Cadell, 2009; Coholic & Eys, 2015). As well, these children and their caregivers reported increased emotional intelligence demonstrating success with identifying and regulating emotions through mindfulness techniques effectively facilitated through art-based methods (Coholic et al., 2009; Coholic & Eys, 2015).

Coholic (2019) explained that the incorporation of arts-based methods in social work flattens power dynamics as clients are empowered through symbolic and visual forms of communication, not relying solely on their ability to articulate their thoughts, feelings, or goals. As well, clients can learn and grow through enjoyable, satisfying experiences that may encourage a deeper commitment to participation and their own personal growth, providing skills that are more likely to be utilized outside of the therapeutic setting (Flook et al., 2010, Coholic, 2019).

Damianakis (2007) found four themes with what she describes as the “intersection” of the arts and social work. First, arts-based approaches within social work create the potential to awaken both the professional and the client emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Second, the construction of language, especially in creative writing, is consistent with social work skills that

reflect empathy and active listening. Third, the professional can use the arts in the form of self-care. And last, a “transcendence of knowledge division” occurs that disrupts the professional’s norms and routines creating the potential to open up to the unexpected, providing greater capacity to help.

There are limitations with the use of arts-based methods in social work. As with any therapeutic approach, creative interventions can involve ethical risks and potential harm caused by unskilful practitioners and the use of methods with inadequate research proving their efficacy (Reamer, 2006). Konrad (2017) pointed out the need for supervision that helps to ensure the social worker’s practice with arts-based methods is appropriate and ethical, the risk for misinterpretation of a client’s art is acknowledged and minimized through training and reflexive practice, and the potential to diagnose is ameliorated.

EXAT Application in Support of the Bereaved

Potash and Ho (2014) described the benefits of EXAT in support of bereavement. Expressive arts therapists must encourage and accept a full range of emotions to encourage the creative process, metaphoric communication, and to memorialize the deceased. As bereaved individuals are tasked with creating new identities and new realities for themselves, the creative process helps to facilitate integration of the loss and provides a way to make meaning of the loss (Neimeyer & Sands, 2011). The griever is allowed to engage with the art in a way that is not about the finished product but something that is ongoing, messy, non-linear, and allows for an approach avoidance process, much like the grief experience itself. Potash and Ho (2014) explained that metaphoric communication or dual communication, enables better communication between the receiver of the art form and the creator of the art form. This interaction facilitates

better understanding of often painful emotions, allowing for release and transformation while providing the creator opportunity to observe their own grief and communicate the experience to others. And lastly, Potash and Ho (2014) described how art can be used to memorialize the deceased as well as the grief process, honoring both. Art works created throughout the grief process can serve as symbolic representation of the journey.

Expressive arts therapy including visual art, music, dance, drama, movement, writing and poetry, are an effective intervention for trauma (Malchiodi, 2012). As Conforti (2014) stated people seem compelled to relive traumatic events and keep alive the painful emotions throughout their lives until they experience some type of healing. This healing frees the sufferer from painful repetitive remembering and traumatic experience. The non-verbal aspects of the arts and the many ways that humanity has found to express deeply felt emotions is as mysterious as this creative urge that allows humans to transcend suffering. This transcendence through expressive arts has the potential to guide the individual towards integrating traumatic loss to a manageable place within their lives rather than being defined and controlled by them (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014).

A grounded theory study of therapist's perceptions of expressive art therapy with grieving children reported that children were able to express and experience their own emotions when EXAT was used (Horns, 2007). The participants noted that the use of expressive arts enabled the child to go deeper into their feelings while providing a safe container to manage those emotions. The participants revealed that the use of expressive arts decreases vulnerability, increases self-esteem, empowers, soothes and allows the child opportunity to externalize their emotions. Other outcomes identified by Horns (2007) included the ability to better engage socially and academically, the ability to re-engage in life, increases in playfulness, decreases in

anxiety and depression, and the development of positive coping skills. Some limitations pointed out by Horns (2007) included the fact that some children may not like art and may refuse or be reluctant to participate. They also recognized that the process may tap into very intense and painful emotions too quickly therefore measures must be taken to make sure the client feels safe, contained, and in control of the therapeutic process.

Hogg (2018), in a study exploring the use of expressive arts with male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, reported the expressive arts to be useful for facilitating a sense of empowerment and personal agency suggesting expressive arts may help male survivors regain a sense of control over their body and their decisions, while giving them experience of art making that they can feel proud of.

Webb-Ferebee (2001) showed the use of expressive arts therapy with bereaved families found improvements in the functioning of bereaved families as a whole as well as with individual family members. Expressive arts therapy was used to help members not abandon their painful grief but to experience it from a different perspective, stating that healing is something that emerges over time and art therapies create opportunities for self-expression that leads to healing.

Falldien (2018) found that arts-based methods offer a way to explore feelings without talking about them directly, providing an alternative means of expression that is less threatening to the individual who is experiencing the traumatic event. In her work with bereavement groups using arts-based methods, Falldien (2018) reported that participants described their experience as being helpful in their own grief experience, in gaining personal insight, and in making meaning of the loss and their changed world. Although group members reported that they continued to

feel pain and distress related to their loss, they also recognized personal growth that they contributed to the group experience.

Knight and Gitterman (2014) found that bereavement support groups may help members to feel less isolated in their grief as they process through the group process with others who share similar experiences. As well, members have opportunity to learn about adaptive coping strategies by listening to grief narratives of other members. The relationships formed in group become mutually beneficial as newly bereaved members may be encouraged by the progress of those who have processed further in their grief journeys and those who have been grieving longer have the benefit of realizing how far they have progressed as they witness the early grief patterns of the newly bereaved (MacNair-Semands, Ogrodniczuk, & Joyce, 2010). In this give and take relationship within bereavement groups, members have opportunity to experience the benefits of altruistic giving that can be empowering, helping the griever to shift their attention away from their own personal grief narrative and the emotional pain they are experiencing (Knight & Gitterman, 2014). Arts-based group programs can include a wide variety of creative interventions such as meditation, poetry, music, visual art, dance and movement, and sand tray and can produce positive outcomes such as emotional regulation and decreases in grief symptoms such as depression and anxiety (Olson & McEwen, 2004).

Summary of the Literature

There is nothing new about the use of expressive arts for communication, celebration, healing, and more; these practices can be traced back to the beginnings of human existence and can be found in every culture around the world. Music has the ability to tap into the unconscious allowing for reflection and processing; creative writing has the ability to open discussion that leads to deeper processing of thoughts and emotions; body movement and dance assist in the

integration of mental, emotional, and physical aspects of self; visual arts use imagery, colour and shape to help clients process thoughts and feelings that are often too difficult to verbalize; and play therapy and sand tray therapy have been effective tactile, nonverbal techniques that are useful when personal issues are too difficult to articulate. These approaches are conducive to social work practice, which requires creative problem solving, whereby creativity is used effectively to shape, mold, influence and uncover unrealized potential in clients. Expressive Arts Therapy also aligns with social work practice in its theoretical underpinnings, stemming from humanistic, client-centered perspectives. The literature also supports the use of arts-based therapeutic approaches within social work in support of bereaved individuals in both individual support sessions and in support groups. As a means of provoking emotions, communicating through metaphor, and memorializing the deceased, EXA therapists must encourage and accept the full range of emotions that present through arts-based processes. As bereaved individuals are tasked with creating new identities and new realities for themselves, the creative process helps to facilitate integration of the loss and provides a way to make meaning of the loss. Literature supports the non-verbal nature of the arts, along with its transcendent nature, as an effective means of uncovering the deep suffering while providing a means of expression that can lead to positive change.

Chapter 2 - Description of the Advanced Practicum Environment

My advanced practicum took place at the Haliburton School of the Arts in Haliburton, Ontario and at Hospice Georgian Triangle (HGT) in Collingwood, Ontario. Although I am a visual artist, I had not received training in Art Therapy or Expressive Art Therapy prior to this eight-week course and had not had opportunity to use any form of art therapy in my position as Bereavement Coordinator within hospice.

The Expressive Arts Therapy course took place at Fleming College through Haliburton School of the Arts. This 8-week Ontario College Graduate Certificate program satisfied 380 hours of my advanced practicum, involving 47.5 hours per week in class and in the studio. As an Expressive Arts practitioner, I am now able to incorporate a range of creative options into my existing professional practice. Through this expressive art training I have learned how to facilitate the development and transformation of the people I am supporting using arts-based approaches. Through knowledge and skills acquired, I am able to explore my own creativity while designing and delivering expressive arts programming to bereaved individuals at hospice. This highly experiential program has equipped me to support my clients in their grief and bereavement as they learn to accept the reality of their loss, embrace the painful emotions, re-organize their lives, and move towards recovery. This course also included opportunities to examine the theoretical and practical approaches to expressive arts as a means of supporting bereaved individuals. Courses included Introduction to Expressive Arts, Exploring Relationships, Stories from the Field, Expressive Arts Modalities, Mindful Music and Movement in Expressive Arts, Planning Expressive Arts Experiences, Professional Issues within Expressive Arts, and Sand Tray and Writing within Expressive Arts.

After completing the EXA certificate program, I began applying EXAT at hospice within support groups with newly bereaved individuals, satisfying the remaining 70 hours of the 450-hour advanced practicum requirement. My intent was to explore the benefits of expressive arts therapy in bereavement support groups within hospice by facilitating two, 6-week, closed support groups with 6-8 participants in each group, with each group session being 2-hours in length. Successful completion of the Haliburton course provided me with the skills and confidence necessary to apply clinical competencies within bereavement support groups to the

benefit of group members. Under the supervision of my field supervisor, Kelly Smith, I planned and facilitated both support groups, one consisting of members having experienced the death of a loved one, identified as a “non-specific loss” group and the other group consisting of members who have experienced the death of a spouse/partner.

Seventy hours of practical application of newly acquired skills involved (inclusive of two separate bereavement support groups) 8 hours of curriculum planning and organization of needed materials, 4 hours of group promotion and co-facilitator orientation, 12 hours of pre-group preparations and set-up, 24 hours in group session, 12 hours of post-group clean-up and debrief with co-facilitator, and 12 hours of weekly reflection.

Agreements with the Organizations

After reviewing the curriculum from Fleming College through Haliburton School of Arts Expressive Arts Therapy program, visiting the facility in Haliburton, and speaking with administrators at the school explaining my plans for my MSW Advanced Practicum, I was accepted to the program and began on April 22, 2019, completing the program on June 14, 2019. This certificate program was designed specifically for the incorporation of EXAT in professional practice.

I have developed and facilitated two bereavement support groups with adults at HGT in Collingwood, Ontario, under the direction of hospice staff and supervised by an independent social worker and sand tray/play therapist, Kelly Smith. Once supervising parties agreed to my practicum proposal and required student documents were provided to HGT, I received verbal permission from executive director, Kelly Borg to begin EXA bereavement group facilitation.

Expressive Arts Facilitator Training, 8-Week Course Descriptions

Introduction to Expressive Arts

Tapping into our creativity provides a natural source of imagery and energy useful for healing and personal expression. This initial course in Expressive Arts (EXA) at the Haliburton School of the Arts provided an introduction to the theory and practice of the expressive arts (Fleming College, 2019a). As well, the applicability of EXA in the human service field was explored, reinforcing the appropriateness of EXA within social work practice.

Upon completion of this initial course, an EXA practitioner will be equipped to identify health risks of the media, using all materials, equipment, and tools safely in order to protect oneself, the clients, and the environment. As well, graduates are able to articulate the professional similarities and differences between Expressive Arts Therapy, Art Therapy, and Expressive Arts Facilitation. An opportunity to demonstrate an articulated understanding of the challenges, benefits and outcomes of the Expressive Arts within the human services field and to demonstrate and evaluate selected expressive arts modalities and intermodal transitions was also provided. Students were also required to demonstrate knowledge and skills needed to facilitate an EXA experience and were given the opportunity to exercise those skills with fellow students.

Materials & Modalities in Expressive Arts/Mandalas

The second course week offered the opportunity to explore a selection of art supplies as students were required to experiment with their properties, applications, and suitability for use in expressive arts experiences with different populations (Fleming College, 2019b). Wet and dry visual arts materials, 3D art media, mixed media, fabric/fibre processes, papers, adhesives, and

other materials were demonstrated and offered for experimentation, building on an expressive arts toolkit. As well, students were taught the modality of mandalas, an ancient and powerful tool for focusing, contemplation, and personal spiritual growth including centering exercises, visual, movement, sound and writing modalities while creating expressive mandalas, a personal mandala, and a collaborative mandala. Historical and modern uses of mandalas were explored including ritual, self-exploration, and expressive mandalas from diverse eastern and western traditions. Students were also given opportunity to learn how mandalas, symbols, mindfulness practices, and working with circles can be incorporated into personal and professional work within the expressive arts including the use of mandala and mindfulness as powerful tools for self-care for professionals. Applications will be of interest to professionals working with children, youth, and adults in educational, health, recreation, spiritual care, or therapeutic settings.

Upon completion of this course, EXA practitioners are able to describe the specific properties of at least three art materials and tools and how they affect choices for specific expressive arts experiences, develop and demonstrate at least three new art-making skills, describe and demonstrate how to combine art-making techniques for effective, inter-modal expressive arts experiences, discuss the historical and modern use of mandalas, employ warm-up exercises that ease hesitation about 'making art' that can be incorporated into professional work, demonstrate appropriate techniques and team building skills based around the use of mandalas, identify how mandalas, symbols, and working with circles can be incorporated into both personal and professional work within the expressive arts, demonstrate an understanding of how to integrate the use of mandalas across populations, demonstrate knowledge of the mandala as a tool for self-exploration and to promote mindfulness, demonstrate how mindfulness practices and creative

visualization techniques can be integrated into expressive arts exercises, and lastly, create a personal mandala with paint, demonstrating the concepts and applications of mandala work.

Mindful Music & Movement in Expressive Arts

The first part of this week taught mindful music and the creation of intentional soundscapes as a practice that can be applied to various contexts including group celebrations, rituals of loss, community building events, or deep listening meditations (Fleming College, 2019c). Mindful music incorporates user-friendly instruments and allows individuals to express aspects of human life through the use of soundscapes.

The second part of the week focused on mindful movement and dance, exploring the body-mind connection and the psychological and sensory states that exist in the body (Fleming College, 2019c). Students were introduced to a wide variety of approaches and techniques to experience the continuity and deep connection of the mind-body processes. Experiences of the expressive potential of the body was the predominant mode of expression while also allowing for multimodal approaches such as writing and image making. The experience culminated in a student living arts performance experience that integrated the personal narrative while engaging the body in movement.

Upon completion of this course, students were able to define key musical terms such as soundscape, entrainment, drone, and overtone, identify which musical instruments should be used for specific soundscapes, create a safe environment for the person receiving a soundscape, collaborate with others in designing a sonic ritual, discern when to use sounds that excite and when to incorporate sounds that calm, and identify how to sequence with movement, sound and breath, to experience a state of embodiment. Students will also be able to demonstrate the use of

image and sensation prompts to enhance body awareness on a physical and emotional level and demonstrate how to change habitual patterns of gestures, posture and movement. And lastly, students will be able to demonstrate the ability to develop a ritualized performance using self portraits drawn from an emotional, physical, spiritual and split-off part of self. The self portrait will be used as a base to explore dance and writing, and deepen into more detailed image making.

Sandtray & Writing within Expressive Arts

This course provided an introduction to the practice and theory of Sandtray-Worldplay Therapy and the application of journaling within Expressive Arts (Fleming College, 2019d). These modalities give voice to the internal and external worlds of both children and adults. They are tools with which to explore, for example, issues of loss, abuse, and self-esteem and can provide new perspectives on life experiences. Learning will be facilitated through the use of didactic, demonstrated, and experiential methods. In the sand tray portion, all participants built sand trays as well as observed others, with ample opportunity for questions, discussion and feedback. Emerging from the sand tray section, students gently moved into journaling using various creative techniques of exploring the inner and outer worlds through writing, poetry, movement and art making. Students learned to weave these modalities through each other to give them greater form and personal meaning. This course was appropriate for professionals working with children and adults in educational, health, recreation or therapeutic settings.

Upon completion of this course, students are able to explain Sandtray-Worldplay theory, explain how to set up a space that is conducive to play and therapeutic work that includes a selection of toys and materials, explain the role of the practitioner in the helping relationship as it

is expressed during the process of a therapeutic session, demonstrate Sandtray-Worldplay techniques through hands-on experiential exercises, demonstrate ways of working with various styles of journaling, demonstrate the power of poetry in both the poetry of others and in writing your own, produce several small poems from techniques offered, discuss options for adopting skills learned with various populations, identify ways of integrating poetry and journaling into expressive arts experiences, prepare journaling exercises for self-care and professional development, and discuss personal experiences that will enhance the learning experience.

Planning & Practice in Expressive Arts

This course taught students how to plan and lead expressive arts experiences for others (Fleming College, 2019e). Instruction addressed a broad spectrum of expressive arts experiences including the presentation of theoretical tools for assessing which type of experience might be appropriate for various individuals and populations, gaining a better understanding of how music, movement, visual, and narrative arts can promote self-awareness and personal growth with various populations.

Upon completion of this course, students were able to explain the creative process and the value and dynamics of the process of art making, experience firsthand self-expression and the creative process in the arts, encourage growth, empowerment, and creativity in others through expressive arts, create a safe environment appropriate to expressive arts experiences, articulate and evaluate selected techniques utilized in the process of expressive art making within a professional field of expertise, and identify how expressive arts may be used to empower individuals, families, or groups. Students also learned how to design, deliver, and evaluate

effective expressive arts programming for a variety of clients in a variety of environments, applying theories to create an expressive arts practice plan.

Expressive Arts - Stories from the Field

This course offered a unique combination of hearing stories from Expressive Arts program graduates working in the field and exploration of storytelling and how we might use storytelling in our own practice (Fleming College, 2019f). Students learned how to incorporate fairy tales, myths, legends, and other storytelling mechanisms such as masks and puppets, into their professional practice.

Upon completion of this course students are able to present and tell a story as a means to begin and/or end an expressive arts experience for a chosen population and describe subsequent expressive arts activities, present at least one original story in a chosen framework such as a fairy tale, demonstrate alternative storytelling techniques in at least one chosen form (e.g. masks, puppets, art, music and movement), identify and present one or more methods of bridging into client's stories and explain how to amplify those stories in other expressive arts modalities, develop and present at least one way to engage people in a group story, and present at least one plan to take expressive arts into a chosen field and chosen population. As well, students were given opportunity to compile relevant questions for expressive arts guests working in the field and interview these professionals via video meetings.

Exploring Relationships

This course invited students to explore various types of relationships and connections as they progressed from working on self to working in pairs, to working in groups, using expressive arts (Fleming College, 2019g). Experiential, demonstrated, and didactic learning methods

explored the depth and value of expressive arts and their power to deepen connections. Students were encouraged to take advantage of group connections to deepen personal expressive arts experience, awareness and appreciation. Ample opportunity for practice, discussion and feedback using role-play was offered including the role of the client, the expressive arts practitioner, and the witness/observer.

Upon completion of this course, students are able to discover and acknowledge the inner child as a significant part of the adult self, explore a variety of ways of getting to know the child of memory, and the current child along with his/her needs, and introduce the inner child to themselves and to others in authentic ways. Students were able to participate in a variety of experiences that celebrate the creative, spiritual and vulnerable child; exploring ways of being with and eliciting information from children. Students were also taught to recognize the range of normal developmental differences in children and explore a variety of alternative means of appropriate interaction.

Professionalism in Expressive Arts

Given the importance of recognizing the parameters of utilizing expressive arts within the bounds of one's training experience, students were taught to effectively manage situations that are beyond the scope of their professional practice (Fleming College, 2019h). Students also gained a better understanding of the needs of cultural and racial minorities, and how these needs can be appropriately integrated into the expressive arts. As well, the course taught how to recognize and creatively manage burnout. The course also covered ethical and professional issues which may arise as a result of using the expressive arts.

Upon completion of this course students were able to encourage growth and development in others through expressive arts, analyse the range and scope of literature and practice within the expressive arts field, understand professional and ethical issues within the use of expressive arts, identify how expressive arts may be used to empower individuals and groups, recognize parameters and limitations of using the expressive arts within non-therapeutic settings, adapt resources and delivery of expressive arts programs to ensure that material is gender-free and suitable for cross-cultural environments, and finally, develop effective stress management strategies to ensure that professional rapport is objective and appropriate.

Expressive Arts Bereavement Support Group Curriculum

Two bereavement support groups using expressive arts were conducted over six weeks at Hospice Georgian Triangle in Collingwood, Ontario. The same curriculum was used with each group (Appendix A). Expressive arts modalities were incorporated each week taking into consideration the continuum of medium, keeping in mind the EXA intent of low skill, high sensitivity (DeGruitjer, 2019). The exercises built into each session lead into the following week, going deeper into a better realization of the emotions that accompany the grief experience with new insight into adaptive coping strategies and acceptance of the grief process with an end goal towards a shift in grief and an experience of healing to some degree. Each participant was invited to participate in the activities each week and then discuss their experience with the group. This type of sharing was meant to be mutually beneficial as each member had opportunity to bear witness to the experiences of fellow group members thereby gaining insight into their own grief experience. The groups were facilitated by myself with a volunteer assistant, provided by the hospice, who are trained in hospice/palliative care support. The first group was populated by clients who had experienced the death of a loved one and had been in contact with HGT for

bereavement support. The first group was comprised of individuals grieving the death of a loved one other than their spouse or child and were referred to as “non-specific loss” group with 6 individuals registered. One registered group member experienced an injury and was unable to attend group, leaving 5 members. The second group was populated by 5 individuals who had experienced the death of their spouse and who also contacted HGT for bereavement support.

The six weekly sessions included; Week 1 - Introductions and Simple Drawings, with the intention of opening the group, setting guidelines and expectations, introductions, setting personal goals, and becoming familiar with modality shifts; Week 2 - Meet My Loved One, with the intention of introducing the group to their loved one using visual representations, story telling as members narrate chosen aspect of their loved one and the relationship they had, artistic responses to their narratives, and creative writing in response to the visual art; Week 3 - Exploring Emotions with Music, with the intention of exploring emotions related to grief and provide alternate forms of expression using music/sound, visual art, and creative writing as opposed to speech; Week 4 – Letter Writing and Paper Making, with the intention of connecting with the deceased in a different way, repositioning the relationship, and beginning to redefine who they are in a changed world; Week 5 – Mandala, Sacred Circle, with the intention of helping the members release the unconscious to speak through symbol, facilitate integration of scattered emotions and mind through the use of finger labyrinth and mandala; and Week 6 - 3 Parts, Collage, with the intention of helping participants see how far they have come in their grief journey, honour their emotional pain and the grief journey itself, and begin to look forward to redefining self.

Chapter 3 - Critical Analysis of Advanced Practicum, Reflexivity and Reflective Practice

This chapter will define and discuss reflexivity and reflective practices in social work and the importance of adopting these skills in practice and in social work research. This chapter will also discuss the first part of my practicum, the eight-week intensive, Expressive Arts Therapy training, with regards to reflexive practices, how they were implemented, and the insights and information gained as a result. Examples of reflexive practice from my practicum will be provided as well as descriptions of various EXAT modalities and how they were integrated during the course.

Reflection/Reflexivity

Reflexivity is self-awareness and the ability to think about our thinking, to have a feeling about a feeling, to have a desire about a desire, and then allow that self-awareness to translate into action (Rennie, 2004). Original definitions of reflexivity provided basic understandings stating the capability of bending back and of mental operations turned or directed back upon the mind itself (Salzman, 2002). Reflexivity is most widely defined as the awareness of the influence the researcher has on the people or topic they are studying, while at the same time recognizing how the research experience itself affects those who are conducting the research (Gilgun, 2008). The ability to look at yourself critically and the impact of your reaction to certain situations are the fundamental strengths of reflexivity. Only through reflexivity can the practitioner take a critical stance and recognize how power and knowledge are generated, and how the dominant perspectives influence individuals' thinking (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007).

For social work, reflexive practice means reflecting on the self as a way of controlling for biases, judgements, or values that may affect relationships with clients or group participants (Badwall, 2016). Keenan (2004) described reflexive practice as a way of continuously questioning the influences of interpretation and described the continual process that keeps at the forefront of the clinician's mind the fact that not everyone's experiences are the same as our own. Self-reflection is a defining feature of clinical practice whereby social workers describe themselves, their clients, and the relationship between the two which helps the clinician better understand the many factors that shape client's lives (Keenan, 2004).

Important to student social work practitioners is the ability to examine how their own attitudes, values, and personal issues impact and affect their practice (O'Connor et al., 1999). This form of self-reflection and insight allows students to understand how they interact with the world through this ongoing development of their own personal stories, histories, life experiences, world views, and belief systems which together provide a lens through which they view, understand, and interact with the world (Nash, 2011).

Certainly, a key distinction between reflexivity and other forms of reflective practice have to do with the timing (D'Cruz et al., 2007). Other reflective practices involve looking back on the work retrospectively. Reflexivity takes place before, during, and after the research or clinical work (Trevelyan, Crath, & Chambon, 2014). Probst (2015) described the term "reflexive" as taking actions that direct the attention back to the practitioner creating a circular relationship between the client and the clinician or researcher.

Studying the research process and the role of social workers with regards to the development of consciousness in research, Bransford (2011) explored the need for social workers to think about how dominant ideologies have shaped how they view their professional

roles. Butler, Ford, and Tregaskis (2007) determined that personal narratives through critical reflection help social work practitioners develop their own personal identity fostering greater understanding of their own values, biases, world views, and purpose thereby enabling consideration of alternative points of view. Chapman (2011) pointed out that the practice of critical reflection provides a way for social workers to deconstruct their own power as well as the bureaucratic powers that may not always have the service users' best interests in mind.

Taylor and White (2001) warned that trends toward social work practice that strictly focus on evidence-based assessments backed by rigorous research and knowledge can result in calculated, technical, rational methods of practice that fail to acknowledge the role of emotions, as opposed to approaches that include practical and moral considerations through awareness and reflexivity. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, social workers may tend to lean on these evidence-based assessments to the exclusion of arts-based methods thereby missing opportunities to provide alternative means for clients to express themselves. Also stated previously, social workers are sometimes hesitant to use arts-based approaches in their practice but need only to rely on their social work training while accessing the plethora of resources that will guide them through arts-based exercises (Coholic, 2019). During the Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT) training course, students were taught that using these "low skill, high sensitivity" exercises with very specific intentions with clients does not necessarily require extensive training but can be used to compliment existing competencies (DeGruijter, 2019).

Another type of critical analysis used in social work and taught experientially throughout this course is disclosure analysis. Disclosure analysis is defined as the process of analyzing and interpreting written and spoken interactions as well as events (Ellsworth, Fuhrman, & Oehler, 1996). Schools of social work continue to emphasize the need for skills training that builds on

the process of critically examining written texts and personal experiences through journal writing, in class writing, and in class discussions using practicum experiences that reflect real situations that social workers may be presented with (Allen & Farnsworth, 2013; Chow, Lam, Leung Wong, & Chan, 2011). The result of this type of critical reflection, according to Allen and Farnsworth (2013), is the discovery of alternative options, new concepts, and wider perspectives as students engage in discourse that brings to light the wide range of experiences thereby increasing the student's awareness of the individual or the group.

Karpetis (2010) suggested that students engage in a "process reflection" that brings to surface the social work student's awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, including the emotional impact that they may face as they interact with their clients. However, Ellsworth, Fuhrman, and Oehler (1996) taught that students should not rely on text analysis alone but need to pay attention to social structures and processes under which knowledge is produced and legitimized. Chow, et al., (2011) likewise wrote that in order to encourage reflexivity among social work students, openness to knowledge and increased understanding of social problems should be encouraged by requiring students to engage in journal writing, self-directed learning, reflective discussion, and experimental exercises.

Ferguson (2018) described reflection in action, stating that this type of reflection at the time of interaction with the client is often difficult and avoided by social workers as a means of self-protection as practitioners maintain a vested interest in not going to the depths of difficult experiences with clients. This conscientious decision is a consequence of the balance sought in professional practice between thinking about emotional and sensory experiences as they occurred in the moment and not thinking about them too much and becoming over preoccupied and paralysed by them. Ferguson (2018) pointed out that some non-reflection can be healthy as a

practical way of self-preservation while meeting important goals in practice. An expectation that social work students as well as experienced practitioners should be able to reflect in action, even in very intense, highly emotional situations can be very problematic for the practitioner and may not even be possible, desirable or beneficial (Ferguson, 2018).

Incorporating what reflexivity means to me as a social work practitioner is to consider the ways in which, as a critical and conscientious thinker, I affect others due to the imbalance of power in the therapeutic relationship. A valuable practice is to consistently consider the structural positioning that forms my thoughts and actions which informs my own personal story in relation to the structural positioning of my clients and their personal narratives.

In order to avoid contributing to structural inequality in my practice, it is important for me to analyse and deconstruct my own narrative. This deconstruction broadens my ability to develop empathy and critical questioning techniques. Deconstruction for me personally means to investigate how, as a white, educated, middle class, able, female in a professional position will relate to and interpret the discourse and actions of others who may be from a different race, education level, socio-economic background, ability, or gender. As well, I have the responsibility of scrutinizing how my own personal beliefs, intentions, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes may reinforce social structures that affect relations between practitioner and client with regards to power and privilege.

Throughout this process of becoming a critically reflective practitioner, I have gained a better understanding of the importance of critical analysis as vital in reconstructing narratives, understanding diversity and difference, and rethinking my social work practice. I have gained a greater understanding of the effects of the dominant language, the search for multiple truths and developing conceptual frameworks through reflexivity thereby gaining a better understanding of

how my own personal influences may direct and influence outcomes for my clients. This process is crucial, carrying with it, significant responsibility to understand my own social and cultural background as well as my assumptions, interpretations, and reactions to various circumstances presented by my clients. Only within consistent self-analysis will I be able to develop competencies for an effective reflexive practice. Accordingly, next, I will discuss and analyze my own narrative and its influence on my work.

Critical Reflection - Haliburton EXAT Intensive

Walking through the front doors of the Haliburton School of the Arts, which read, “Within these walls, the walls within disappear”, I began an eight-week journey into the expressive arts course that would change, not only my social work practice, but my personal art work as well. As reflexivity takes place before, during, and after clinical work or research (Trevelyan, Crath, & Chambon, 2014), and in this case, my advanced practicum, we began the course by setting our personal intentions, writing them on a paper cut out of our own hand, and displaying the hands in a common area so we would be reminded each day of why we were embarking on this journey. This simple exercise set in motion eight weeks of experiential, reflective learning that I took into my professional practice.

I engaged in several modalities to promote reflexivity during my Advanced Practicum at the Haliburton School of the Arts. Several authors recommended the use of journal writing (Allen & Farnsworth, 2013; Chow, Lam, Leung, Wong, & Chan, 2011). Throughout my Advanced Practicum, I maintained a journal of my experiences, many of which I reviewed with my MSW supervisor as well as several of the Haliburton Art School instructors. During the 8-week Expressive Arts course, I had opportunity on a daily basis to consult with instructors to strategize and debrief. During this time, I was able to discuss personal reactions to the various

art modalities as they were applied to myself personally with instructors, as well as interact with fellow students in the same way. Over time and with clinical supervision, I was able to conceive alternative conceptualizations from initial impressions of what I perceived. As well, this highly experiential work led students into very personal realizations about self as we engaged in expressive art therapy training.

During my practicum I maintained a journal and other records, that served several purposes for me. I maintained a daily journal during the EXAT course that served to document the modalities and processes covered each day, but I also recorded my own personal responses during this highly interactive, experiential training. Because students were inundated with information throughout this 8-week intensive course, it was very important to record daily activities, practical information, processes, links to resources, terms and themes to explore in depth later, as well as my own personal responses, on a daily basis. Daily journaling during the EXAT course also provided a means of organizing information in order to make connections to social work theory and practice throughout.

Each week of the course covered a different topic with a different instructor who specialized in that particular modality making daily journaling and record keeping very important. Discourse analysis (Ellsworth, Fuhrman, & Oehler, 1996) involved both a technical journal of EXAT processes and practices as well as a personal journal for my own thoughts and feelings as I applied the EXAT exercises to myself. As well, private consultations with instructors and in-class discussions were important in helping me discover alternative options, new concepts, and wider perspectives. For example, on a broader scale the class discussed options or adaptations that could be made to the expressive arts experiences in order to meet client needs or to customize an experience to better meet cultural needs and expectations or to

make accommodations, ensuring accessibility for all clients. For instance, some of the EXAT experiences needed to be modified to serve clients at bedside in hospital, hospice, or long-term care. As well, special considerations need to be given to those with mobility issues or developmental challenges.

Private consultations with instructors involved exploration of issues around supporting bereaved clients in groups; the focus of my practicum. For example, when planning an EXAT bereavement group curriculum, special consideration needed to be given to the continuum of medium. The continuum of medium refers to the effects that particular art medium can have on the user (Wilkinson, 2019). For example, dry medium such as pencil or soft pastel is less emotionally provocative than a wet medium such as watercolour paint or clay (DeGruijter, 2019). Likewise, retelling existing, fictional stories is less provocative than narrating one's own personal story of loss. Creative writing in very simple forms such as a haiku, acrostic, or cinquain poetry may be less provocative than mask making which may have very personal, intimate meanings attached that can provoke strong emotional responses. Simple drawings and mark making with pencil or charcoal is a great way to introduce EXAT while mandala and sandtray can take the client into emotional depths too quickly if introduced too early in the therapeutic relationship or group. An example of these safety considerations, with regards to grief support specifically, had to do with choosing appropriate EXAT exercises for my bereavement groups. I planned to use a weaving exercise involving textiles from family members including the deceased. I wanted to ask group participants to bring personal items that belonged to their loved ones such as a shirt or dress, a favorite blanket, or some other fabric that was significant, along with fabric from other family members. The material was to be torn into

strips and then woven together to create a tapestry that represents the connectedness and enduring relationship of the family members, even with those who are deceased.



Figure 1 - Family Tapestry example by Teresa Harris

Through discourse analysis including private discussions with the instructor and journal writing, I determined that tearing the fabric might be too emotionally provocative for some group members who might associate the tearing or destruction of the garment or personal belonging with further loss, the deterioration of their loved one's health, or with the death itself. These reflective practices afforded me opportunity to discover alternative options, viewing the EXAT experience from a wider perspective that had not occurred to me before so that I was able to ameliorate possible damaging emotional triggers by providing a choice to either rip the fabric into strips, gently cut strips of fabric with scissors, or provide the option to decline entirely by offering other options that did not require creating strips of fabric. In this way, group members could decide for themselves how to best approach the EXAT exercise but could also benefit from witnessing the process and results experienced by others who chose the original method.

With this EXAT course being highly experiential, we were expected to accept the expressive arts invitations, which was to participate in the exercises that were offered in order to deepen our learning experience, and reflect on them as well as provide feedback to fellow

students as compassionate witnesses. In EXAT the invitation is always given but the participant reserves the right to accept or refuse the invitation (DeGruijter, 2019). I found this type of reflection in action (Ferguson, 2018) very challenging because it required self-examination that had the potential to uncover areas of self that need improvement or areas that are emotionally painful to acknowledge. Even as early as the first week of the course, we were invited to examine aspects of ourselves through EXAT. The personal work being done and the highly emotional nature of it, both during the exercises and afterwards, was very challenging, especially during what was termed the “harvest” (DeGruijter, 2019), when we reflected upon our process and finished work with the entire class. What came to be termed by students as “deep diving”, referred to students’ willingness to analyse themselves and remain open to new awareness and realizations regarding self as well as referring to the depth each of us was willing to go to as we either fully engaged in EXAT or remained somewhat detached, as a compassionate witness, during the exercises. This type of personal work helped me better understand what I am asking my clients to engage with and the expectations it can potentially place on already vulnerable individuals. I was also able to realize, first hand, the benefits of this work and will be able to pass along personal knowledge through self-disclosure when appropriate.

As noted above, throughout the EXAT course students were required to not only participate in EXAT exercises but were encouraged to share experiences regarding both the process and the outcome through in-class discussion in real time. This example of reflection in action (Ferguson, 2018) can be very difficult especially for those in helping professions. For example, social workers may prefer to maintain a professional distance from their client’s emotional responses to therapy in order to avoid burn out or vicarious emotional distress (Ferguson, 2018). My first in-class experience with reflection in action took place in the first

week and involved an exploration of my inner critic including EXAT exercises moving from creative writing, to movement, to the creation of a 3-dimensional representation of my inner critic. Figure 2 is a representation of my Inner Critic, the 3-dimensional piece that evolved as I was creating it. The Styrofoam ball represents underlying doubt and fear that is fed by my Inner Critic, the coloured bands of plasticine represent aspects of myself that I acknowledge and share with others, while the Inner Critic stays buried within. During this process, I decided to cut the ball in half as representational of releasing those negative thoughts and self-doubt fed by my Inner Critic. The wire and metal mesh that surrounded the sphere were representational of self-protections and coping strategies that needed to be undone or loosed in order to let go of the influence of the Inner Critic. The drift wood was representational of my support system that buoys me.



Figure 1- Inner Critic by Teresa Harris

As mentioned, these exercises were followed by the invitation to share not only the finished pieces, but more importantly, the creative process and the realizations or insights gained. This reflection in action, while sometimes emotionally difficult, taught me about myself and my own vulnerabilities and insecurities and how they might affect interactions with clients in terms of how I think and feel about myself, the client, and the circumstances they bring to therapy. For example, when a client presents with overwhelming emotional pain and loss that is further

complicated by mental health issues or structural oppression, I have, in the past, doubted my professional ability to offer meaningful, effective support to the individual. I have learned that when using EXAT, creating a safe space, offering the invitation, employing social work skills of active listening, leading the client through the “harvest” where they glean insight and understanding from the experience, and then making sure the client is grounded before they leave, will benefit the client in ways that may only be apparent to them. I learned that I must reflect upon my own feelings of insecurity, accepting that they exist, but not let those feelings interfere with my professional practice. I realized that I must trust the process in the same way I encourage my clients to. The exercise also gave me insight into what my clients may be experiencing as they disclose personal information and make themselves vulnerable during therapy.

Another example of reflection in action took place in the third week – Movement and Dance in EXAT. This modality in particular was one that initially brought about some hesitation for me personally as I feared the instructor’s expectation that I participate in something that I was uncomfortable with. As I began to engage with the teaching and exercises, I set the intention, through journaling, that I would remain open and teachable as a willing participant. EXAT exercises in this modality culminated in a performance type “installation” that could involve movement, dance, spoken word, visual art, and/or mask. Figure 3 is a photo of myself with a painting that served as a back drop for my performance piece that involved the reading of a short story I wrote in response to the painting. The painting is representational of three aspects of my being and how they present themselves, how they serve me, and under what circumstances they are employed by me. The short story described specific times when those aspects of self were needed. After the reading, having been witnessed by the class and instructors, I was given

opportunity to describe my process and any insights I gained and then feedback was invited and given by witnesses, whereby I felt heard and understood.



Figure 3 - Personal Movement Installation

This experience taught me deeply personal things about myself and, although extremely uncomfortable before and during the “installation”, the experience left me feeling empowered and accomplished once finished. For example, I realized the benefits of externalizing my personal story, being heard and understood by others, and having my personal challenges normalized by my peers and instructors. Reflection in Action during class, among classmates and instructors furthered my confidence and gave me new insight into the courage it sometimes requires from clients when they actively engage in therapy as they seek positive change and emancipation. I am also better able to speak from a place of experience, having participated in the exercise myself. I am, however, more keenly aware of the harm that could occur if clients engage past the point of comfort for them and how they might feel obligated or even pressured to comply with the social worker in order to “get it right” or to please the professional. This

potential limitation to the work was made apparent when a fellow student confided that she shared more than she intended when performing her “installation” and had regrets about that.

During the EXAT training week Professional Practice in Expressive Arts Therapy, our focus was on better understanding our own identity and giftedness as professionals and how we might use that information to better support our clients (Gallant, 2019). Students were led through EXAT exercises that fostered this type of self-discovery and provided an opportunity for personal narratives through critical reflection (Butler, Ford, & Tregaskis, 2007). For example, we completed identity charts that were meant to uncover unrealized aspects of self by exploring our own views of who we are as well as labels or attributes assigned to us by others. Working in dyads, we interviewed our partner asking probing questions that led into self-discovery. The questions were related to family of origin, family of choice, work experience, interest in EXAT, accomplishments, challenges, and successes. Before and after this exercise we were invited to create three masks using pre-formed masks along with any other art materials that were available as well as found or natural objects. As seen in Figure 4, the first mask was created by myself before the interview, the second mask represented myself and was created by my partner before the interview, and the third mask represented myself and was created by my partner after the interview. Once all three masks were completed, each dyad had opportunity to present the masks and discuss the experience with the larger group. After the presentations, we were asked to journal about the experience.

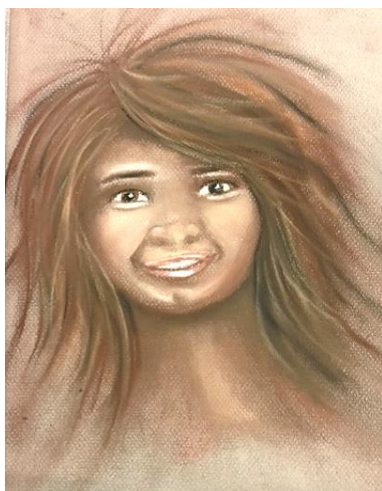


Figure 4 - My Three Masks

Through this exercise and subsequent journaling, as I was witnessed and had opportunity to witness my partner, I gained a better understanding of how dominant ideologies have shaped me and my approach to social work and EXAT as well as my own personal identity. This type of self examination, along with the mask representations of me before and after the interview by someone who did not know me prior, helped me foster greater understanding of my own values, biases, world views, and purpose, enabling consideration of alternative points of view. For instance, I realized how different my partner is from me because of differences in our age, sexual orientation, family of origin, ethnicity, health, and socio-economic positioning. I realized that I make assumptions based on my own perceived norms because I am heterosexual, a mother, American, without mental illness or addictions recovery, Caucasian, and middle class. These differences can affect how I might interact with a client. For example, I might be quick to make assumptions about a client's motives without considering the difficulties they face because they are a visible minority or because they used the only coping mechanism available to them in a time of crisis, and one that was detrimental such as drug abuse.

I was then given a case study and asked to consider how this client's values, biases, world views, and purpose might be different from my own and how my approach to therapy might be impacted by those differences. There was then an invitation given to create an art work and

creative writing piece in response to that consideration. My case study involved an Indigenous woman who had attended a residential school in Ontario. This exercise juxtaposed myself and the individual in the case study and taught me an effective way of becoming more aware of my own values, biases, and world views as compared to the other person and how I that might affect our working relationship. I was able to consider the privileges I am afforded because of who I am and how that may differ from my client and affect the way we view one another. From the identity chart, to interviews with class mates from similar yet different backgrounds, to comparisons with someone from a very different background, I was able to see more clearly who I am and how those realities affect me and my practice. When presented with a client file or conducting an intake and assessment with a new client, I will not be quick to form opinions or make assumptions. Instead, I will draw from these experiences and training and remain open to the client, allowing them to narrate their own story, direct their own intervention according to their needs and timing, searching for strengths and abilities that may be hidden. I will be better able to provide unbiased, non-judgemental support to the best of my ability, in light of this new understanding and sensitivity to differences and the societal consequences of those differences.



Freedom

*Youthful, Beauty
Soft and kind
Light and full of joy
Her smile
Is her life force
Hopeful and calm
Curious and powerful
What is her name?
What is her past?
Her name is Freedom
And her past if forgiven*

Figure 5 - Representation of Young Girl, Residential School Survivor with Poem by Teresa Harris

Karpetis (2010) suggested that students engage in a “process reflection” and this EXAT course practicum certainly offered many opportunities to engage in this type of reflexivity. For example, during the second week, we were taught to use mandala, first for ourselves and then we learned how to apply this teaching to our professional practice in one to one support and within groups. By engaging in the creation of mandala, students had several opportunities for self-examination and reflection. The invitation to create a self-mandala was given whereby the unconscious had opportunity to speak, not through lineal, rational thoughts, but through symbolism (Leis, 2019). For this self-mandala, detailed instructions were given as to how to draw the 14-inch mandala on watercolour paper. Watercolour paint, a more emotionally provocative medium (DeGrujter, 2019), was assigned for this exercise and the group was instructed to move through the exercise together but in silent introspection. There were periods of meditation while emotionally stirring music played that helped to deepen the experience and take students from one aspect of the mandala to another while respecting the liminal space between those aspects. This journey into “self” started with the outer ring of the mandala which represented our known strengths, inward to the next ring which represented important aspects of our physical world, deeper into the next ring that represented our dream world, onto the next ring considering who or what is within our support system, and finally into the center of the mandala to discover ourselves and any new realizations about “self”. This full-day process was emotionally charged and brought forth new insights that allow me to better understand myself, the value of mandala, and how it might be used with clients to their benefit, bringing about positive change. For example, a client or group member, experiencing grief after the death of their spouse might gain new insight and understanding about themselves in a way that could help them move forward in their grief by realizing, in a new way, their own strengths and abilities,

what they place value on, who in their life provides love and support, and what they hope for going forward. The reflexive practice of journaling furthered this understanding and provided even more insight into my strengths, what I deem significant or important, my hopes going forward, where my support and sense of safety comes from, and then who I am and who I might become in light of that information. The instructor then held a two-sided mirror up to my mandala, commenting “this is what you see (single mandala), and this is what your soul sees” (Leis, 2019).



Figure 6- Self Mandala



Figure 7 - Self Mandala (as seen in a 2-sided mirror)

Just as mandala is effective as a tool for self-reflection, expressive writing is another expressive arts modality that offers a way for social workers to process practice experiences and engage in reflection and critical analysis to support personal and professional development (Heinonen, Halonen, & Krahn, 2019). During EXAT training I learned that creative writing, in several forms, is an effective means of reflection as well as self-care. For example, in week four of training, we learned to use proprioceptive writing whereby unlined paper was provided as well as new pens, lit candles, provocative music, and instructions to write for a prescribed amount of time, either 1 minute, 2 minutes...up to 20 minutes. We were instructed to write continuously without regard to grammar or punctuation. Proprioceptive writing, developed by Linda Metcalf and Tobin Simon, is a writing method that involves meditation as the writer listens mindfully to

their own thoughts, focusing attention, blocking out all other stimuli, forming new paths of communication between the intellect and the heart (Noel, 2016).

I also learned to write responsively by choosing and viewing story cards with images on them. The purpose of this writing was to consider various perceptions of the same image teaching us that we view the world around us in very different ways because of our varied backgrounds and previous experiences. This exercise also taught me to consider, accept, and respect alternative explanations and points of view. We were also taught various formats for writing simple poems such as haiku, acrostic, box poems, cinquain, shape poetry, French pantoum, and diamante poems. Writing poetry served several purposes; we used them to discover/uncover truths about ourselves, debrief a difficult experience, contrast two opposite themes, communicate difficult truths, resolve conflict, or describe something deeply meaningful but difficult to explain. For instance, after walking a labyrinth with the intention of discovering truths about myself and my anxiety about my current work load, the theme “slow down” came to the surface of my consciousness. In response to this realization, I wrote three poems; a French pantoum, a diamante, and an acrostic poem. These poems were written after a willow was identified as representational of my desire to slow down. The theme of “slow down” was understood more clearly and internalized more deeply with each writing. Finally, a painting of a willow tree was created in response to the experience and serves as a visual reminder to “slow down”.

<p style="text-align: center;">Diamante Poem - Slow Down</p> <p>A. Rabbit B. Fast, Worried C. Hopping, Twitching, Fretting D. Fur, Paws, Shell, Claws E. Contemplating, Resting, Accomplishing F. Slow, Thoughtful G. Turtle</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Acrostic Poem: The Willow</p> <p>S – Steady L – Laboring O – Old W – Willow D – Deeply O – Owning W – Winding -- --</p>
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Figure 8 - Diamante and Acrostic Poems by Teresa Harris

In social work practice, storytelling can be valued as a strengths-based approach (Furman, Downey, Jackson, and Bender, 2002). According to Saleebey (2009) strengths-based approaches are a critical component of social work practice and involve the premise that all individuals have resources and strengths to manage or move beyond the difficult circumstances they face. By calling attention to client strengths instead of their problem stories, the development of personal stories of strength and resilience that support transformation and growth are allowed to surface (Saleebey, 2009). Examples of this type of empowering storytelling was taught during the sixth-week of EXAT training and culminated into an opportunity to manifest a character for the purpose of telling a story. We were invited to create a mask and write a story and then use the mask to deliver the story to the class. My character became an amalgamation of several women I met while in Ghana, West Africa in 2007 and 2008. These women were former Trokosi slaves, an ancient practice involving the slavery of girls and young women for the purpose of atoning for an offense committed by the girl's family members. While in Ghana, I had opportunity to interview many former Trokosi women and heard about the mental, emotional, and physical abuse as well as denial of what little education most girls received. I wrote a story that combined aspects of many of these stories. My character's name was Amani and the mask I made was used to tell her story of emancipation and empowerment after being

released from her captors. Amani went on to attend a vocational training school where she learned a trade and was then able to provide for herself.



Figure 9- Amani Mask, created by Teresa Harris

Conclusion

These are only a few examples of EXAT exercises that, along with purposeful, focused reflective practices, have taught me not only how to implement EXAT into my social work practice, but how these exercises can be beneficial to both practitioner and client. Through a deeper understanding of reflexivity and reflective practices, I have learned the importance of critical analysis before, during, and after client interactions, group sessions, learning experiences, or research and how this reflection increases professionalism. Engaging in expressive arts is only crafting or recreation unless there is a focused intention. Through reflection, the professional and/or client has opportunity to determine if their intentions were met, what was learned through the expressive arts process, and what the finished product has to offer with regards to new information that may lead to a better understanding of self and how that information might be used to provoke positive change. This eight-week intensive course in EXAT will not only have a significant impact on my social work practice but has been extremely

impactful on a personal level in a way that has made me more self-aware, conscientious, and present. This new insight and awareness will translate into a more effective, responsible, ethical, empathic, and compassionate social worker. In the following chapter I discuss how these expressive arts practices and principles were put into practical application by myself as facilitator for two bereavement support groups in an Ontario hospice.

Chapter 4 - Critical Analysis, EXAT Bereavement Support Groups in Hospice

The following chapter will discuss arts-based approaches within groups, and specifically my experience as group facilitator using Expressive Arts Therapy in two bereavement groups at Hospice Georgian Triangle (HGT) in Collingwood, Ontario. I will describe each of the groups and the curriculum that was used each week as well as outcomes with successes and areas for improvement.

Group work using creative methods is not new. Ruth Middleman, an American social worker, wrote in 1968 about what she described as the non-verbal way of working in groups with clients, stating that the power of the imagination and the creative process in group work is important because the group can represent life (Middleman, 1968). As group members participate in expressive arts within groups, members have opportunity to develop their own coping strategies and resilience as they engage with the various art materials and modalities and by sharing their process and experiences with the other group members afterwards (Stevens, 2013). EXAT group facilitators should create a safe-space for group members to engage in expressive arts allowing members freedom to explore, create, and express themselves while also being careful to attend to individual as well as group needs insuring all are accepted and the environment is non-judgemental and respectful (Stevens, 2013).

Art making for social change is also an important part of group work using EXAT (Heinonen, Halonen, & Krahn, 2019). The process of social change may start with efforts to become more aware, take more personal responsibility for one's own healing, or by developing an inner contemplative practice, all of which have potential to change societies and can start within group work (Estrella, 2007). It has been my experience as a bereavement support group facilitator, that those recovering from the death of a loved one, once they have experienced a certain degree of healing, have a desire to help others experiencing similar circumstances. An important aspect of our group experience is to normalize the grief experience and educate others, changing public perceptions about grief, in order to lessen confusion, misinformation, or stigma related to grief so that griever might receive more support and understanding as they heal. Among groups of grieving people experiencing oppressive emotional pain, EXAT contributes to group cohesion and makes it an act of self-definition in the face of this emotional pain, developing strength and resiliency (Moxley, 2013). For example, story telling, poetry, and creative writing in groups can initiate conversation that promotes group cohesiveness, mutual understanding, and acceptance while also promoting honesty, empathy, connectedness, and belonging within groups (Furman et al., 2002).

Through my own experience as an EXAT bereavement support group facilitator, I have witnessed opportunities for members to explore their ideas, feelings, and experiences, addressing different aspects of the grief experience, noting similarities and differences in each member's process as unique stories of success and challenges emerge through the creative process. In the right environment, open sharing helps everyone to gain adaptive coping strategies while better understanding the detriments of avoidance through maladaptive coping strategies while grieving.

The second part of my advanced practicum was conducted at Hospice Georgian Triangle in Collingwood, Ontario. The Bereavement Coordinator populated the two groups for bereavement support using EXAT. Group 1 was a non-specific loss bereavement group and Group 2 was a spousal loss bereavement group. Hospice staff also provided two hospice volunteers as assistants and oversaw the process that allowed me the opportunity to facilitate EXAT experiences for 10 grieving individuals within the two groups (the groups are described below).

Along with the bereavement coordinator, I had opportunity to consult with and debrief with my practicum supervisor, Kelly Smith. This supervision provided much needed insight, validation, problem solving, and alternate perspectives that allowed me to conceive of and facilitate effective expressive arts experiences for my group members.

I maintained a journal for each group and reflected on the planning process, how each modality was executed and received, how participants responded to the process and their finished art work, my own thoughts and feelings throughout, how intentions were or were not met, and how I might adjust going forward. For example, during session three with the spousal loss group, I invited participants to write a diamante poem in response to paintings they had created. The creative writing exercise required that members write according to a prescribed pattern including the use of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. One group member found the exercise difficult as she struggled with the grammar and seemed embarrassed to share her poem with the group. Recording this experience and problem solving through journaling provided a means for reflection, problem solving, and adjustments going forward. In future EXAT groups where poetry is used, I will provide examples of the type of poetry we will use and lists of words for

group members to choose from that could be used with indications where they might be appropriate.

Following, I have broken down each group session in the six-week group experience with titles, descriptions of the EXAT exercises, as well as pictures of some of the group members' work, along with quotes from members and personal reflections on successes and challenges throughout the process.

Session 1 – EXAT Introduction

During the first group session, introductions were made and the group had opportunity to learn who their fellow group members were and who had died. This first group session also involved a brief introduction of myself, the volunteer assistant, and the expressive arts therapy that we would engage with. Group 1 was a non-specific loss group with six members registered initially, however, one individual had an injury and was unable to attend. The five remaining group members had experienced the death of loved ones including a mother who died after a cancer diagnosis, a son who died by suicide, a father who died from COPD, a daughter who died from cancer, and a sibling who died suddenly in an accident. The second group had 5 members registered, all women who had experienced the death of their spouse, one having died suddenly from a heart attack and four members who experienced the deaths of their husbands after having received cancer diagnoses. After introductions were made and group guidelines were discussed, members were invited to record their personal intentions for this group experience, a reflexive exercise that encourages thoughtful introspection before the EXAT experience begins (D'Cruz et al., 2007), by tracing their hands on paper, cutting the shapes out, and writing intentions on them to be seen, touched, and considered at each subsequent group meeting. Mindful meditation was

introduced in order to focus group members for the EXAT exercise to follow. Soft, emotionally provocative music was played while the invitation was given for group members to begin to explore dry medium using pencil, charcoal, crayon, or coloured pencil to make marks in response to prompts such as, “what do you think of when you remember your loved one?”, “make marks that represent what you are feeling as you remember”, and “make marks that represent the relationship you had with your loved one”. Figure 1 provides examples of some of the drawings made by group members.



Figure 20- EXAT Bereavement Group Members Responsive Mark Making

After the exercise, members were invited back to the circle to discuss not only the marks and images they created but more importantly, the process, including thoughts and emotions that came up during the exercise and after. Members reported being surprised by the intensity of emotions that presented, how quickly the time seemed to pass, and memories that were evoked during the exercise.

One member stated:

I don't usually let myself think about it because I don't want to feel bad. I try to stay busy. Being quiet and concentrating so hard on my husband forced me to go there.

Another member stated:

That made me cry and I haven't really been able to cry since she died. I was afraid this would happen but now that it has, I'm glad. I think it will be okay.

This initial EXAT exercise was effective in meeting objectives for the first session with set intentions of making introductions to one another and the EXAT process discussed. The integration of meditation, music, and visual art led members into an expressive arts experience that allowed them to tap into memories thereby provoking emotions that they were able to express and then discuss with the larger group where their emotional pain and experiences were shared with compassionate witnesses. There was a short meditation before closing the group and information was provided concerning the next group session.

Going into the first group session, I was very nervous and concerned that group members may not embrace the EXAT exercises or accept invitations to participate. I relied on lessons learned during EXAT training in Haliburton regarding self-doubt and my "inner critic" and focused on my mandate as EXAT facilitator, which is to let the art and the process do the work; my responsibility is to create a safe space, offer information, extend the invitation, and debrief with members afterwards.

Session 2 – Meet My Loved One

The second week was emotionally difficult for both groups as group members were instructed the previous week to bring photos of their loved one and/or memorabilia that represents or is indicative of their loved one for the purpose of "introducing" them to the group and telling their story. The story they were to tell was of their own choosing; members could focus on their relationship's beginning, the illness or death, or any other aspect of the deceased

loved one. After a brief check-in with each member, asking how their previous week went with regards to their grief and a short meditation to focus the group, members were invited to begin sharing. Once they finished their story and photos/memorabilia were passed around the group, permission to ask questions was requested and the conversation continued. After each member had shared, we were going to move into an EXAT experience whereby wet medium was to be introduced and members would be asked to create a painting in response to their narrative experience, however, time ran out in both of the groups as a result of this exercise, preventing us from moving into that part of the EXAT experience. Perhaps better time management during the story telling portion would have allowed us to move into the visual art exercise. However, the group determined the time of sharing was valuable to them, with one member stating:

I dreaded today and almost didn't come but this was great...I really don't have anyone I can talk to about my mother. My friends don't understand why I can't get over it and I know I make people uncomfortable...so I usually just shut up about her. I haven't talked about this stuff in a long time. This felt great!

By not allowing time for the visual art portion, the group did not receive the benefit of an intermodal EXAT experience. I realized how important time management is within EXAT, a skill that was demonstrated on a daily basis by the instructors within EXAT training. As I reflected on the process later, I became aware of my hesitancy to be assertive with group members who tend to dominate conversation. By allowing one group member to consume more time during her turn to share as well as interrupting others during their time, I denied the group as a whole from benefitting from the full EXAT experience. This experience has taught me the importance of my role as facilitator and has brought to my awareness areas within my personality that I need to be mindful of when leading a group. For instance, my reluctance to

risk confrontation or to potentially hurt a member's feelings by interrupting them, gives the more dominant member unspoken permission to consume too much of the group's time. In retrospect, I could have gently reminded the individual and the group as a whole of the group guidelines and expectations that were established during the first group session. The list of guidelines and expectations were compiled by the group members themselves and agreed upon in the first session in order to foster a safe and respectful environment. As the facilitator, it was my responsibility to make sure the guidelines and expectations were adhered to.

Session 3 – Exploring Emotions with Sound

In the third week, groups were exposed to sound as small percussion instruments were introduced. The intention for this week was to explore emotions related to grief and provide alternate forms of expression by using music/sound, visual art, and creative writing as opposed to spoken words.



Figure 11- Small Percussion Instruments Used in EXAT Bereavement Groups

After a brief check-in with group members as well as meditation to focus the group and to create a liminal space, the invitation was given to sit comfortably with eyes closed and listen as each instrument was played. Group members were then asked if they identified with any of the sounds they heard as it relates to their grief experience. They were invited to play the

instrument of their choice, producing the sound they identified with and discuss the reason for their choice. We then played the instruments all together to create a community of grief and talked about how each person's experience is unique to them and their circumstances. We also talked about the benefit of grieving as a community of people as opposed to grieving in isolation. Members were then invited to use the more emotionally provocative wet mediums, acrylic or watercolour paint, on watercolour paper to paint a representation of the sound and emotion that they identified with.



Figure 12- Visual Representations of Emotions

Group members were then introduced to diamante poems and invited to write their own poem in response to the sound exercise and then share their poems with the group.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. AngerB. Hot, PainfulC. Burning, Churning, HurtingD. Knife, Fire, Water, SongE. Flowing, Freeing, EasingF. Soft, KindG. Peaceful |
|--|

Figure 13 - Example of a Diamante Poem by Group Member

The session ended with a poetry reading and a debrief about the process and any new realizations that may have occurred. Members were encouraged to journal more at home about the experience. This session met the intentions of identifying painful grief emotions and finding alternative means of expressing them. One group member found the sound from the instruments upsetting and needed to keep her eyes open. Two other members commented on some sounds being annoying or unpleasant. We were able to talk about how some emotions can be annoying and unpleasant as well. Some statements made by group members:

Sometimes I don't know how I feel but today I was able to give it a sound at least.

It felt good to pound the drum and get the anger out in a different way.

I felt annoyed by many of the sounds and they made me a bit anxious, I didn't really like it.

This session was challenging for me because I am not a musician and not familiar or comfortable playing instruments. During EXAT training, I was exposed to dozens of instruments, producing a variety of unique sounds and received training with regards to the efficacy of music therapy (Diggins, 2019), but still felt inadequate when applying music/sound within the bereavement groups. Again, trusting the creative process, I introduced the modality to the groups and was very pleased by the amount of discussion that was generated, both positive towards the exercise as well as negative aspects of the exercise, all of which was beneficial to the experience. These sessions further demonstrated the effectiveness of this modality within EXAT and the EXAT mandate of low skill, high sensitivity (DeGruijter, 2019).

Session 4 – The Relationship Transformation, Letter Writing and Paper Making

This session involved very personal, inward reflection. The session began with a check in and brief meditation. Playdough was provided and group members were asked to choose two colours. One colour represented themselves and the other colour represented their loved one. They were invited to form the playdough into a shape that is representative of themselves. Each member shared the meaning and significance of their colour choice and shape. Then members were invited to form the playdough into a shape that is representative of their loved one and then likewise, share the meaning and significance. In this time of describing their shapes, strong emotions were expressed as memories were accessed. Then the members were asked to blend both shapes together. Once blended, they were asked to take the two colours apart and return them to the shapes that had previously been formed. Obviously, they could not accomplish this and there was conversation about the enduring relationship and how it is still there but has transformed into something different, but something that can never be taken away or separated.



Figure 14 - Example of Playdough Representations of Self and Deceased Loved One

Then members were invited to write a letter to their loved one. Paper and pens were provided, provocative music played in the background, and members were given 40 minutes to write their letters. This process brought up very strong emotions and some members needed to leave the room to compose themselves. All returned and finished the exercise and were then instructed to thoughtfully read their letters and add anything that needed to be written. They

were then invited to gently and ceremonially tear or cut the paper into very small pieces. If this was too emotionally provocative for group members, they were invited to keep the letter as is. Then the paper was put into a blender with water and additional shredded paper and coloured paper of choice if desired and then blended into a pulp that was poured into a paper making mold and then transferred to paper towels and allowed to dry. The finished paper with the letter incorporated could then be taken home and used for any purpose the member chose.



Figure 15 - Hand Made Paper with Letter to Deceased Loved One Incorporated

Groups wrapped up with a debrief about the process with thoughts and feelings that arose. There was discussion about connecting with their loved ones in new ways, repositioning the relationship in their lives as they move forward, and beginning to redefine themselves in their changed world. This session met the set intentions and was very well received by group members, some stating:

This has been the most important exercise for me so far. It gave me a chance to say things I hadn't had time to say to him before he died...and some things I really couldn't say.

I will keep writing letters; this was a great way to get it out.

I said things I would never say to anyone, some things no one knows about.

And stated in a subsequent group session:

The letter I wrote really changed things. I was able to let the guilt go. I think that's why

I am able to smile now, because before I was just beating myself up everyday.

By this, the 4th week, group members had become familiar with one another and conversation was more casual and freer flowing. Feeling more confident in my role, and drawing from previous group experiences regarding time management, I was able to keep the group focused and on track, moving from one modality to another. None of the group members declined to tear their letters for the paper making process, in fact, tearing the letters seemed to allow for more honest writing, knowing the letter would never be read by others.

Session 5 – Self Mandala

The fifth group session used mandala to set intentions, release emotions, receive new insights, reflect, allow the unconscious to speak through symbolism, and seek integration of scattered thoughts and emotions through mandala (Leis, 2019). The groups were invited to complete a Self Mandala that explored personal strengths, things of value to members personally, hopes and dreams, support systems, and finally, themselves. After check in, group members were given a brief description of mandala, led into meditation that would create liminal space in preparation for the creation of a Self Mandala. Pre-drawn mandalas were provided, along with watercolour paints and the invitation was given to paint each ring of the mandala together, but in silence, as instructions were given, while provocative music played in the background. I led the group providing instructions and keeping track of time as they moved from one ring of the mandala, working from the outside inward, in a clock-wise direction. The

middle circle of the mandala represented the self and was the last part to be completed. Once finished, the group reconvened for a debrief to discuss the process and finished mandalas.



Figure 16 - Group Members Self Mandala

Group members were not as enthusiastic about mandala as they had been about previous EXAT exercises but did state that the debrief afterwards brought about more insight than they realized while the mandala was being created. One member struggled to identify strengths but was encouraged by the other members during debrief as they pointed out strengths they had noticed in that member. Another group member noted that it was difficult to identify tangible items of significance as nothing held meaning to her in light of her husband's death. Another group member discussed difficulty in identifying those who make up her support system or those she would consider protectors, stating that her support system is very limited and those in her life currently were more hurtful than supportive. The group encouraged this member, telling her that they would be a part of her support system and contact information was exchanged.

During the EXAT training I had opportunity for a very meaningful experience as we created a Self Mandala. This experience, however, took place over an entire day. The two-hour bereavement group sessions in hospice did not allow for that type of contemplative practice.

Through my own experience with mandala as well as witnessing the experiences of other students in EXAT training, I feel confident that this exercise is beneficial for self-discovery, but may be better suited for a half or full-day workshop or weekend retreat.

Session 6 – Collage, Before and After

In the sixth week, collage was used to help members realize how far they have progressed in their grief journey, honour their emotional pain, and the grief journey itself, and begin to look forward towards redefining themselves (Wilkinson, 2019). After a check-in and meditation, the purpose of collage was discussed. Members were then invited to create two collages by intuitively choosing images that are representative of the relationship they had with their loved one and second, images that represent where they see themselves, in terms of their grief recovery, in five years. Each collage was timed and when finished, members were encouraged to journal on the reverse side, describing the images and what they represented as well as any new realizations that surfaced.



Figure 17 - Before and After Collage by Group Member

When finished, the group discussed their final pieces and the thought process they went through as they created the collages. Several group members described strong emotion while

creating the first collage as they remembered the relationship but experienced a sense of “lightness” and hope while creating the second collage that brought about forward thinking towards their future as they considered how they might continue to heal and experience growth as they move forward.

Ending on a positive note that is forward thinking and recovery focused was important. Each member described various aspects of their loved one and the relationship they had as well as significant parts of the relationship that will be most difficult to let go of. Each member also described, sometimes through tears, where they hope to be in five years and what they might be doing. It was surprising how significant the images, chosen intuitively without much time to think, were to the final narrative within the group.

Conclusion

This part of my advanced practicum provided opportunity to apply aspects of the Expressive Arts Therapy training that I engaged with at the Haliburton Art School within bereavement support groups in hospice. There were far too many Expressive Arts Therapy exercises and experiences to include them all, nor would they all have been beneficial for grief and bereavement support groups. Through this experience of group facilitation, I learned what was effective for this purpose and which EXAT experiences might be better used in other settings with other populations.

I had opportunity to learn from some of the challenges faced while facilitating these groups, for example, some of the exercises require far more time than is allowed within a two-hour group session, such as the “Self Mandala”; simplifying this exercise will be necessary if used in a two-hour session. As well, during the second week when we engaged with the “Meet

My Loved One” exercise of personal story telling, there was not enough time for the intermodal expressive arts experience that was to follow, a visual art response to their personal story telling. When time runs out and parts of the EXAT experience are omitted or when time allotted for an exercise is lessened and members are rushed, the experience can be dampened. For instance, the liminal space or period between one EXAT exercise and another, when the creative process is being fostered (DeGruijter, 2019), can be extinguished if not respected or when rushed. As well, I learned that special attention needs to be given when leading group members into creative writing exercises. All members may not feel comfortable or capable when asked to use nouns and adjectives in a prescribed manner as an expression of their grief experience; the grammar may be a barrier and members might be embarrassed when invited to share their work. Examples of the poems need to be provided as well as lists of words that could be chosen by the member for their own writing.

Equally valuable to this group facilitation experience was learning through the successes. Week four, Letter Writing and Paper Making, was very effective as members were led through intermodal expressive arts including 3-dimensional representations of self and loved one, personal letters written to loved ones, and then paper making that represented the transformed relationship, all with the intention of acceptance of the death, assurance of an enduring relationship with the deceased, and relocation of the relationship in the griever’s life. As well, although use of the Self-Mandala EXAT exercise was challenging due to its complexity and time requirements, the group benefitted during the “harvest” or debrief after the exercise when each described their finished mandala and their creative process. As some members expressed concern or regret due to lack of support or significant others in their lives, or lack of personal strengths, the other group members stepped in to encourage that member by pointing out

perceived strengths and offering their ongoing support to the member. Also, during session three – Exploring Emotions Through Sound, group members were able to identify emotions related to their grief experience and give that emotion a sound and thereby giving the emotion another means of expression. Although some members found the various sounds from the instruments annoying or even disturbing, during the subsequent “harvest” or debrief time, most members found value in expressing negative emotions and had opportunity to have those emotions normalized as part of the grief experience.

A more personal realization occurred even before the groups began as I was feeling doubtful about the effectiveness of Expressive Arts Therapy, my own competency to lead an EXAT support group, and how EXAT might be received by group members. By reflecting back in my journals written during the EXAT training, both my personal journal and my academic journal, I was able to connect again with lessons learned about myself, my insecurities, as well as my newly acquired skills and abilities. This process gave me the confidence that I needed to proceed with the groups relying on my social work training, EXAT training, and the arts-based approach itself, confident that group members would glean what they need from the experiences offered. By journaling and consulting with supervisors during the six week group experience, I was able to problem solve, recognizing which EXAT experiences were valuable in this setting and which were not, and make adjustments when and where I was able to. Through this process, I gained confidence to apply EXAT within a bereavement support group for the benefit of group members. The following chapter will summarize my advanced practicum experience including insights from the above literature review and key elements of the EXAT training course and the practical application of EXAT within bereavement support groups that followed. Also, I will discuss implications for EXAT in social work and social change.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

For this advanced practicum, my initial objective was to find a way to incorporate arts-based approaches into my social work practice, offering an alternative means of therapy. As a visual artist, this seemed a logical progression in my professional development. Upon consultation with a Laurentian University social work faculty member, I was made aware of the expressive arts program in Haliburton and the potential for incorporating that 8-week intensive course into my advanced practicum. After applying and receiving acceptance into the expressive arts program, I began to search for ways to apply Expressive Arts Therapy within groups, supporting bereaved individuals in hospice. After contacting three hospices in Ontario, I was accepted to complete part of my advanced practicum at Hospice Georgian Triangle in Collingwood, Ontario. I requested two groups to work with at hospice; the two groups were confirmed and populated by hospice staff from existing bereavement clients, and dates and times for the groups were determined. Before all of those details were confirmed, I was required to submit a proposal to my supervisors in justification of my practicum.

In writing my advanced practicum proposal, I conducted a literature review that explored theoretical perspectives of Expressive Arts Therapy as well as historical and spiritual perspectives. As well, the various art modalities were defined and described along with an exploration of the unique aspect of the integration of those modalities within expressive arts. The literature revealed the long history of expressive arts, long before the terms “expressive arts” or “intermodal expressive therapy” were coined. This realization confirmed the inherent human need to create and use creative ways to communicate with one another whether the communication was for the purpose of celebration, information, expression of emotions, or for healing. The arts are non-verbal in nature and transcendent, taking participants outside of

themselves, to something out of the normal human experience and outside of the physical world where deep suffering can be uncovered and healed (Conforti, 2014). Some authors stated that from the beginning of time, humanity has found ways to express both love and terror through art, and turning away from this creative urge is to diminish our life force and miss opportunities to be fully present with those who are suffering (Conforti, 2014). When incorporating art therapies into our professional practice, we are allowing the spirit to enter into a place where we are able to engage with deep seeded trauma and facilitate change (Conforti, 2014).

Throughout my practicum, both during EXAT training and while facilitating EXAT bereavement groups, I had opportunity to hear personal stories from peers and group members and realized the diverse backgrounds from which we all came. I also had opportunity to witness the transformative effects of EXAT regardless of personal backgrounds or beliefs because the benefits of expressive arts are realized by the individual and come from within and are strengths-based in nature, promoting personal autonomy (Coady & Lehmann, 2016; Cruger-Hansen, 2012; Roger's, 1992; Rogers, 2013; Rothery & Tutty, 2008; Serlin, 2007). However, before entering into EXAT training or group facilitation, I needed to understand the foundations of EXAT.

The foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy can be linked back to Carl Jung (Cruger-Hansen, 2012), who is credited with an intervention called active imagination which refers to conscious actions that create something that is related to unconscious processes (Cruger-Hansen, 2012). Active imagination encourages the individual to relax their normal awareness or inhibitions without completely letting the unconscious take over. To trigger active imagination, Jung encouraged his clients to paint, sculpt, write, act, or use other art forms that tap into the unconscious. As Jung drew from humanistic approaches to therapy, so does EXAT which emphasizes the use of intuitive processes and inductive reasoning to work with each client in

unique and personal ways because individuals have an inherent desire to grow, heal, and self-actualize (Coady & Lehmann, 2016). Humanistic theories such as client-centered theory can be traced back to Carl Rogers in the 1940s and has historical connections to social work practice, believing strongly in the importance of the therapeutic relationship (Coady, 2008). Client-centered theory, as defined by Carl Rogers, is based in developing a relationship with our clients by fostering genuineness, acceptance, and empathy (Rothery & Tutty, 2008).

Building on this understanding of the foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy as well as spiritual and theoretical underpinnings of EXAT, the literature also helped me understand the significance of the intermodal aspects of EXAT as opposed to art therapy that focuses on visual art or a single modality. The significance of intermodal expressive arts is moving from one modality to another with a clear and focused intention which serves to expand the imagination, promoting deeper levels of expression (McNiff, 2009). One art form informs the next as the whole person engages in the therapeutic process, expressing emotional pain and healing from the pain at the same time (McNiff, 2009). Professionals are encouraged to use a variety of art forms with their clients to encourage further creative expression in whatever form meets the needs of the clients (Malchiodi, 2007). The significance of intermodal shifts was demonstrated throughout the highly experiential eight-week EXAT training course which gave me skills necessary to enter into the second part of my practicum, bereavement group facilitation within hospice using EXAT. Having had the advantage of first hand, personal experience and knowledge of the effectiveness of intermodal expressive arts, I was confident that EXAT would be effective and appropriate within a bereavement support group.

The literature also spoke to the efficacy of Expressive Arts Therapy in support of bereavement. As clients memorialize the deceased and process through their grief experience,

expressive arts therapists must encourage and accept a full range of emotions to encourage the creative process while encouraging communication through metaphor (Potash & Ho, 2014). As stated by (Neimeyer & Sands, 2011), bereaved individuals are tasked with creating new identities and new realities for themselves, and the creative process helps to facilitate integration of the loss and provides a way to make meaning of the loss. The grief process is not linear but messy and unpredictable (Potash & Ho, 2014). By engaging in EXAT, the griever is allowed to express themselves likewise, in a way that facilitates an approach/avoidance process much like the grief experience itself. The finished art piece is not the focal point, but instead, the process is reflected upon in order to “harvest” new insights and realizations that may lead to positive change. The literature also introduced to me the concept of “poiesis” or “making” which is the need and ability of humans to shape or re-order their worlds (Levine, 2014). Individuals who are grieving the death of a loved one are tasked with having to re-order or redefine themselves and their world because of the death. EXAT skills have the potential to empower these grieving individuals by providing creative, adaptive coping strategies that enable them to recreate their worlds from within (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). As stated above, this process is strengths-based in nature as self-determination is fostered when answers or insight come from within using art as the vehicle from which that information comes. As effective as EXAT is, not only for bereavement support, but many other applications as well, there are a few limitations that should be considered.

Some clients may be very hesitant to participate with Expressive Arts Therapy because they believe they are not artistic (Malchiodi, 2005; Horns, 2007; McNiff, 2009). This practicum, both the EXAT training and through group facilitation, has taught me that artistic skills or even familiarity with art and art materials is not necessary. A trained EXAT facilitator will lead their

client slowly into EXAT experiences with the information they need to feel confident while being mindful not to provoke strong emotions too quickly, causing unnecessary distress for the client or group members (Wilkinson, 2019). On the other hand, some clients that have been trained in the arts or are skilled in one art modality or another, may find EXAT difficult due to their training (Malchiodi, 2005). Formal training in the arts may not allow clients to let go of right or wrong ways of producing art and instead, create intuitively tapping into the unconscious realm (McNiff, 2009). Other limitations identified in the literature have to do with cost of art materials and the availability of appropriate venues as well as acceptance within agencies and organizations that may not understand the effectiveness of arts-based approaches to therapy (Horns, 2007). The authors I read also discussed the detriments of professionals using EXAT without proper training. Although social workers can, by accessing readily available resources that will guide them through arts-based approaches with clients use arts-based approaches in their practices (Coholic, 2019), they should do so with clinical supervision while maintaining a reflective practice (Karpetsis, 2010; DeGrujter, 2019; Wilkinson, 2019).

Throughout this process, I have gained an appreciation for the benefits of maintaining a reflective practice in social work. The ability to look at myself critically and understand the impact of my reactions to certain situations has had a significant impact on my learning during this advanced practicum. Reflective practice will continue to inform my work as I maintain journals, consult with supervisors, and further my own contemplative practices such as mindful meditation, mandala, and personal use of other expressive art modalities. As well, while facilitating groups, I have realized not only the benefits of reflection among group members but the necessity of reflection or what was termed in EXAT training, the “harvest” (DeGrujter, 2019), before, during, and after an expressive art experience (D’Cruz et al., 2007). Just as this

reflective practice or “harvest” was taught to me through experiential exercises during EXAT training, I also had opportunity to teach bereavement group members how to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and actions before, during, and after an EXAT experience in order to gain understanding and knowledge about themselves and their circumstances promoting growth, healing, and positive change.

Implications for Social Work

Creative expression is a compelling human need affording social workers opportunity to add arts-based methods to their repertoire to the benefit of their clients, expanding on that inherent need of expression (Heinonen, Halonen, & Krahn, 2019). Social work itself is an art requiring creativity, intuition, and self-expression in order to shape, mold, influence, and uncover unrealized potential (Siporin, 1975). Social workers have unique expertise and knowledge in many areas of the human experience at both micro and macro levels and are open to the increasing use of holistic arts-based methods that create space for positive change and adaptive coping strategies (Coholic, 2014). Social workers need to recognize their clients' unique history, strengths, and culture in order to validate them by allowing them to tell their stories and express themselves in a variety of ways, which is a strengths-based approach and consistent with the social work profession (Jackson, 2015). As stated in our Code of Ethics, social workers must respect the diversity among individuals in Canadian society and the right of individuals to their unique beliefs consistent with the rights of others (Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, 2008). However, as stated, many social workers may find that efforts to incorporate arts-based methods may not be supported by supervisors or the agencies they work for. As well, time constraints, lack of experience, agency mandates, and lack of funding may limit the use of arts-based methods among social workers in their work (Heinonen, Halonen, &

Krahn, 2019). For this reason, more evidence-based research needs to be conducted by social workers that demonstrates the efficacy of arts-based approaches in social work for the benefit of our clients who come from all backgrounds, bringing various social and personal issues.

Expressive arts can be integrated into social work as complementary or alternative forms of expression, therapy, and healing aimed at individual and group change and among many populations in support of a wide array of issues (Huss, 2013). The literature that I reviewed revealed the many applications for EXAT and various populations that might benefit from this therapeutic approach. EXAT training at the Haliburton Art School reinforced this finding as weekly conversation included possible practical applications of the EXAT exercises we were engaging with, such as use with children, teens, seniors, those needing bedside support, the bereaved, individuals with disability, Indigenous individuals and communities, and those suffering from traumatic events. As well, the literature and EXAT training supported the use of EXAT among various groups of people, for example healthcare providers, incarcerated men and women, first responders, caregivers, and refugees.

Within these groups, individuals bring a wide array of personal issues that can be supported through expressive arts. For example, visual art has been known to help individuals living with chronic pain and cancer as strategies for resilience are developed by manipulating simple art material and then sharing their experiences with the social worker (Stevens, 2013). As well, visual arts used by social workers have been shown effective when used with vulnerable children involved in the mental health and child protection systems (Coholic, Oystreck, Posteraro, & Loughheed, 2016). Participation in movement and dance can enhance the quality of life for people who have dementia (Jackson, 2014). Story-telling has the power to shift client's attention away from deficits toward personal strengths, supporting transformation and growth

(Furman, Downey, Jackson, & Bender, 2002). Poetry, for example can promote honesty, acceptance, empathy, connectedness, and belonging (Skudrzyk, Zera, McMahon, Schmidt, Boyne, & Spannaus, 2009). Expressive writing has the capacity to promote catharsis among those with chronic mental illness (Schnekenburger, 2006). Story-telling and narrative approaches have been effective with personal issues such as those living with AIDS, helping clients to create meaning, organize the past, explain the present, and consider alternatives for the future (Caldwell, 2005). Creative writing also benefits social work professionals as they process difficult experiences and heal from repeated exposure to crisis (Baxter, 2011). Opportunities to share stories and express emotional themes can be very powerful, whether orally, through art making, photography, video, storytelling, poetry, music, or dance and movement (Heinonen et al., 2019). With regards to Indigenous perspectives, principles, and practices, expressive arts can play a role based on songs and drumming in indigenous cultures as a way of honouring their stories and providing important healing dimensions for people who have been impacted by marginalization (Dicks, 2014). Social workers who work directly with Indigenous populations can integrate expressive arts approaches to help individuals process the loss of place, homeland, and cultural community by facilitating opportunities to share stories and express emotions that go along with displacement and loss (Heinonen et al., 2019). This type of engagement with individuals and the groups they belong to can lead to social justice and social action within our practices.

In combining art and activism, social workers using expressive arts can draw public attention to many issues of social concern. Social workers seek social justice, change and transformation, to address issues of poverty, inequality, human rights, and oppression as those issues are at the core principles as outlined in our code of ethics, carried out through social action

that raises consciousness, asks critical questions, and draws attention to issues that negatively affect people (Lundy, 2011). Expressive arts taken public have the potential to draw attention to many issues of social concern such as the need to protect the environment or the cessation of needed social programming (Heinonen et al., 2019). Clients have reported that when their art work has been taken into public settings for the purposes of social action, they feel empowered as dialogue leads to greater understanding of their issues, such as those living with the stigma of mental illness (Heinonen et al., 2019; Potash & Ho, 2014).

Expressive arts also have a place within social work research, for example, with the use of the visual arts method of photovoice, research participants take photographs related to the research topic and later discuss them with the researcher creating data narratives and photographs (Harley & Hunn, 2015). As well, arts-based narrative expression such as story-telling and poetry are used in qualitative research methodology using metaphor, symbolism, and imagination as representations of marginalized realities in ways that traditional qualitative research alone cannot accomplish (Leavy, 2009). Another way arts-based approaches to qualitative research can be used in social work involves performance inquiry, which is the exploration of a topic or issue through performance by using metaphor in doing research and in the representation (Fels & McGiven, 2002). Performance inquiry is relational, participatory and can bring about social change. For example, Schmidt (2015), used performance inquiry to collect data using theatre games and activities to create space for Indigenous youth to critically examine their choices concerning their own health.

Conclusion

My journey into Expressive Arts Therapy within social work, and more specifically as used in support of the bereaved, has led me to understand that EXAT is a very effective therapeutic approach in and of itself, but will be an integral part of my social work practice going forward and a great compliment to other therapeutic processes I already use. With the knowledge, skills, and experience I have gained throughout this advanced practicum, I will be able to confidently incorporate EXAT into my practice when working with individuals, groups, and within community events. Whether supporting bereaved individuals or facilitating bereavement groups, or holding memorial services in the community, I know I can trust the EXAT process and feel confident that participants will glean what they need from the experience when it's offered in a professional, responsible way. Going forward, I hope to use EXAT within my social work practice in support of non-professional caregivers, clients at end of life in palliative care settings, residents in long-term care settings, healthcare professionals, and first responders both one to one and within support groups. This experience has been invaluable and has given me unprecedented confidence to boldly offer my skills and abilities within my social work profession.

Appendix A

HGT Expressive Arts Bereavement Support Group Curriculum

Week 1 – Introductions & Simple Drawings

Facilitators:

- Teresa Harris – EXA Facilitator
- Doreen McDonald or Susan Bible – Volunteer Assistants

Participants:

- 6-8 Individuals
- Male or Female Adults
- Experienced the death of a loved one

Date/Time:

- 6 Weeks Consecutive
- July - August 2019
- 3:00-5:00

Intentions for the week:

- Open the group series – set group guidelines and expectations
- Make introductions (Facilitators, members, EXA, group experience, the hearth)
- Set personal intentions for the series
- Feel comfortable with one another and modality shifts

Session Plan:

- Opening – Introductions, expectations/guidelines
- Hands of Intention-trace own hand, cut out, write personal intentions for the group experience, mount hands onto a foam core board that will return each group session
- Name Shout Exercise-stand in circle, say names, remember the name of the person to your left, shift positions, say name in same order as before (even when out of order physically)
- Location Exercise-where do you live in relation to the hospice?
- Simple Drawings (dry medium)-thoughts and feelings are hard to put into words, can be captured in pictures, participants draw in response to simple questions: what do you think of when you remember _____, draw something that describes what you are feeling, draw something that represents how you would like to remember _____.

Materials List:

- Multi-purpose paper
- Pencils, charcoal, colored pencils, markers
- Construction paper
- Foam core board
- Tape, Scissors
- Questions printed on flip chart

Week 2 – Meet My Loved One

Facilitators:

- Teresa Harris – EXA Facilitator
- Doreen McDonald or Susan Bible – Assistant Volunteers

Participants:

- 6-8 Individuals
- Male or Female Adults
- Experienced the death of a loved one

Date/Time:

- 6 Weeks Consecutive
- July - August 2019
- 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Intentions for the week:

- to introduce the group to their loved one using visual representations, story telling as members narrate chosen aspects of their loved one and the relationship they had, artistic responses to their narratives, and creative writing in response to the visual art

Materials List:

- Hearth
- Wet Media - Watercolour and acrylic paints
- Watercolour paper
- Paint brushes
- Containers for water
- Palettes
- Laptop for music
- Wet wipes, drop clothes

Session Plan

- Open the group with a check in – If you were the weather, what type of weather best describes the week you had with regards to your grief experience and why
- Mindful meditation exercise – Body Scan
- Invitation to introduce loved one using visual images and memorabilia, story telling
- Move to art response: watercolour or acrylic painting, visual representation of your loved one
- Circle debrief to discuss artwork, the process
- Poetry reading to close the session

Week 3 – Exploring Emotions with Music

Facilitators:

- Teresa Harris – EXA Facilitator
- Doreen McDonald or Susan Bible – Volunteer Assistants

Participants:

- 6-8 Individuals
- Male or Female Adults
- Experienced the death of a loved one

Date/Time:

- 6 Weeks Consecutive
- July - August 2019
- 3:00-5:00

Intentions for the week:

- to explore emotions related to their grief and provide alternate forms of expression by using music/sound, visual art, and creative writing as opposed to spoken word

Materials List:

- several small percussion instruments
 - tingsha bells
 - egg shakers
 - rain sticks
 - drums
 - pangi seed shell shaker
 - thumb piano
 - wooden cabasa
 - wooden chimes
 - tambourine
 - thunder tube
 - Tibetan singing bowl
- various art materials (paint, pastels, pencil, charcoal, markers)
- Their art journals or Paper for writing
- Pens

Session Plan

- Open the group with a check in/exercise
- Mindful meditation leading into a sound scape
- Play each instrument around and over each participant while they sit/lay comfortably with eyes closed
- Ask discussion questions – which sound represents a grief emotion you are experiencing
- Invite them to create a painting/drawing of what the music they identified with sounded like
- Write a poem (acrostic, haiku, or pantoum) in response to the painting
- Discuss results/debrief
- Closing meditation
- Encourage participants to write in their journals about the experience at home

Week 4 – Letter Writing/Paper Making

Facilitators:

- Teresa Harris – EXA Facilitator
- Doreen McDonald or Susan Bible – Volunteer Assistants

Participants:

- 6-8 Individuals
- Male or Female Adults
- Experienced the death of a loved one

Date/Time:

- 6 Weeks Consecutive
- July - August 2019
- 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Intentions for the week:

- Connect with your loved one in a new way
- Understand that the relationship is not gone, they will never be separated from it
- Reposition the relationship in their life
- Begin to redefine who you are in a changed world

Materials List:

- Paper to write letter, Pens
- Shredded paper for blending
- Decorative additives/pot pouri etc.
- Electric mixer
- Water
- Paper making wood forms
- Plastic tubs
- Paper towels

Session Plan: Paper Making with Letter

- Opening Exercise – with regards to your grief, if you were a tree, which kind and why?
- Meditation with music moving into letter writing
- Write a letter to your spouse (say anything that is on your heart/mind)
- Quietly and thoughtfully shred the letter by hand
- Make paper using the letter (shredded)
- Option: Add other personal elements to the paper (dried flowers, shreds of cloth, etc.)
- Repurpose/transform the paper
- Discuss the process – what came up? discuss the transformed relationship and what that means
- Invitation to add photo of loved one to the dried paper creation and bring back for next week
- Closing Exercise/check out

Week 5 – Mandala, Sacred Circle

Facilitators:

- Teresa Harris – EXA Facilitator
- Doreen McDonald or Susan Bible – Volunteer Assistants

Participants:

- 6-8 Individuals
- Male or Female Adults
- Experienced the death of a loved one

Date/Time:

- 6 Weeks Consecutive
- July – August 2019
- 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Intentions for the week:

- Use mandala and labyrinth to set intentions, release emotions, receive new insights, reflect
- Allow the unconscious to speak through symbolism
- Seek integration of scattered thoughts and emotions through mandala

Materials List:

- Watercolour and Acrylic Paints and markers (wet media), Paint brushes
- Water, paint pallets, paper towels
- Large watercolour paper with mandalas (drawn in advance to save time)
- Mirror “book”
- Finger labyrinth

Session Plan: Self Mandala

- Open with brief description/history/purpose of mandalas and labyrinth
- Meditation to create liminality using a finger labyrinth (a state of creative being, the place where you have the potential to act, but have not yet done so, when you are about to create a thing, you are in liminal space)
- Lead group into the creation of a Self Mandala
- Play provocative music, provide step by step instructions
 - Outer ring – things I need to go inward to keep me safe, ie. courage, love, empathy, passion, emotion, strength
 - Material world ring – nature, people, things that you need, what matters? What doesn't?
 - Dream Ring – hopes, aspirations, fantasy, possibility
 - Gates or Barriers Ring – What are your barriers to entering in? Who will guard your gates? Who is your support, your cheerleader, your protector?
 - Inner space – self, who are you? What have you realized about yourself?
- Share process, results in group, debrief, close session

Week 6 – The 3 Parts, Collage

Facilitators:

- Teresa Harris – EXA Facilitator
- Doreen McDonald or Susan Bible – Volunteer Assistants

Participants:

- 6-8 Individuals
- Male or Female Adults
- Experienced the death of a loved one

Date/Time:

- 6 Weeks Consecutive
- July – August 2019
- 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Intentions for the week:

- Look at where they've been, where they are now, and where they hope to be in a year from now
- to help the participant see how far they have come in their grief journey, honour their emotional pain and the grief journey itself, and begin to look forward towards redefining themselves

Materials List:

- Three 5X7 mat boards for each person
- Wide variety of magazines
- glue
- scissors
- finger labyrinth
- laptop/music

Session Plan: Paper Making with Letter

- Lead group into meditation and gentle movement with music, guided visualization of the journey they've been on (Option: finger labyrinth)
- Begin with first board, give them 20 minutes to create, 2nd and 3rd boards after
- Finish with an invitation to write a French pantoum poem about one of the boards or all three.
- Discuss as a group, invite them to share their experience
- Close the session and the group experience
- Read the Grievors Bill of Rights
- Offer additional resources for grief support

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